

# **WAR AND OCCUPATION IN UDINE 1940-1945**

**Fraser Hope**

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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Name of Candidate: Fraser Hope

Address :

Postal Code:

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This PhD thesis looks at some aspects of the Italian home front during World War Two in the predominantly rural, northeastern province of Udine. It also examines the immediate aftermath of the war, the first few months of the Reconstruction period. The thesis quite deliberately devotes more attention to the early part of the war because, in the case of the Italy, it is the least studied period of the conflict. The vast majority of the research that has been published on Italy in the Second World War has focused on the history of the Resistance 1943-45 and also, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent, the military aspects of the conflict. This PhD thesis is also intended as a contribution to the history of the province of Udine itself. The historiography on the war period in this area has hitherto been very sparse and therefore a chief aim of the thesis is to try to investigate and analyse what happened in the province, especially between the years of 1940-1943.

The PhD thesis focuses on the question of the Fascist air defence organisations and air raid precautions in the province using local archival sources from the *Comitato provinciale protezione antiaerea* (1939-1950). It looks at how the local authorities protected non-combatants and what sort of war they expected Italy to wage. Most studies of aerial warfare have tended to focus on civil defence in industrial and port areas. Udine was a bombing target from 1943 onwards because it was a major hub for railway lines from Nazi Germany to central and southern Italy and was particularly hard and repeatedly hit during the last winter of the war.

In addition, the PhD describes and analyses the brutality and violence during the period of the Italian Social Republic under German occupation. Much has been written about the German atrocities in Italy, but historians have been less interested in writing about the involvement of Italians in violence which was organised by Nazis, but perpetrated by locals. The thesis then explores how the province was run straight after the Germans had left, through an examination of the role of Allied Civil Affairs Officers, and deals with the punishment of local collaborators and Fascists in the aftermath of the war.



**I hereby declare that this thesis, War and Occupation in Udine 1940-1945, is my own work.**

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND SOURCES

### Archives:

ACS – Archivio Centrale dello Stato (Central State Archive, Rome)  
AMU – Archivio del Municipio di Udine  
ASU – Archivio di Stato di Udine  
ASU – Gab. Pref. – Archivio di Stato di Udine, fondo Gabinetto di Prefettura  
NARA – National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC  
Private archive of Guido Jesu

### Newspapers:

*Il Gazzettino*  
*Il Messaggero Veneto*  
*Il Popolo del Friuli*  
*Libertà*  
*Nuovo Friuli*

### Other abbreviations used in the footnotes:

ACC – Allied Control Commission  
b. – busta  
CAO – Civil Affairs Officer  
CLN – Comitato di liberazione nazionale  
CVL – Corpo volontari della libertà  
f. – fascicolo  
sf. – sottofascicolo  
GNR – Guardia nazionale repubblicana  
IFSML – Istituto friulano per la storia del movimento di liberazione  
MI – Ministero dell'Interno  
MVSN – Milizia volontaria per la sicurezza nazionale  
PdF – Il Popolo del Friuli  
PFR – Partito fascista repubblicano  
PLO – Provincial Legal Officer  
PS – Pubblica sicurezza  
RG – Record Group  
RSI – Repubblica sociale italiana  
SITREP – Situation Report  
SPD CR – Segretaria particolare del duce, Carteggio riservato

# The Province of Udine by its borders of 1940



## INTRODUCTION

This PhD thesis looks at some aspects of the Italian home front during World War Two in the predominantly rural, northeastern province of Udine. It also examines the immediate aftermath of the war, the first few months of the Reconstruction period. I have quite deliberately devoted more attention to the early part of the war because, in the case of the Italy, it is the least studied period of the conflict. The vast majority of the research that has been published on Italy in the Second World War has focused on the history of the Resistance 1943-45 and also, albeit to a somewhat lesser extent, the military aspects of the conflict.

There is no doubt that the Resistance was a very important phenomenon in Italian history. Historians have often argued that the anti-Fascist movement effectively removed the 'stain' of Fascism and paved the way for a new democratic Italy based on the values of this anti-Fascist movement. This made it possible to disclaim Fascism as the basis for the political system of the new Italian Republic. Therefore, the Resistance experience was viewed as a defining moment in recent history, which cleansed Italy of its Fascist past and of its war guilt.

Until recently, the Resistance was used by successive generations of politicians to legitimate their political aims and most post-war political parties claimed to be its heirs. The Resistance, however, took place almost entirely in the last three years of the conflict, which in part explains the relative dearth of research into the early war years 1940-1943. Another reason why the Resistance has received such a large amount of scholarly attention is that it made an important contribution to Allied victory. Partisans fought the Germans behind the lines, as it were, and hampered communications between Nazi Germany and the battlefield during the Italian Campaign. In some places there were even pitched battles against the Nazi troops, especially in the final weeks of the war. Moreover, the Resistance was a movement far wider than the numbers of actual combatants would suggest: there were also large numbers of other people involved, women, children and older men, in communications or support roles.<sup>1</sup> Given this context, I decided not to recount or analyse in detail the history of the local Resistance. Many other historians before me have devoted themselves to this task.

Instead, the thesis attempts to explore, through a local case study, some aspects of the home front, part of Italy's experience during the Second World War that is far less well-known. It is my contention that the shortcomings of the organisation of the home front and civil defence were not simply due to the cultural failings of Italian society, as some historians have suggested. In discussing why Fascist Italy, a great power of sorts, failed to live up even to its performance in the previous World War, historians have tended to concentrate on Mussolini's goals and policies, but there has been little research into how provincial Italians responded locally to the demands of the regime in Rome. This PhD thesis is also intended as a contribution to the history of the province of Udine itself. The historiography on the war period in this area has hitherto been very sparse and therefore a chief aim of the thesis is to try to investigate and analyse what happened in the province, especially between the years of 1940-43.

Much of the PhD thesis derives from research carried out at the State Archives in Udine (*Archivio di Stato di Udine*), an institution which was itself created by the Fascist regime in 1941 to hold all the documents of state bureaucracies and to keep most of the town council archive. One of the most important sources on local preparations for war is the Prefect's papers in these State Archives (*Gabinetto della Prefettura*) which include correspondence between the local Prefect and the various government ministries, especially the Interior Ministry and the War Ministry, which were both responsible for the organisation of vital aspects of the home front. In addition, this archive contains correspondence between the Prefect and local officials regarding the war demands of the regime.

The State Archives in Udine also have important material in the archive of the *Comitato provinciale protezione antiaerea (1939-1950)*. This archive has a remarkably rich documentation relating to air defence organisations and air raid precautions in the province. Not only does it contain important ministerial circulars, copies of which can be found in most provincial archives, but unlike many other provincial archives, it also has detailed local reports and correspondence which shed light on the extent to which national orders were actually carried out in the province.

To date, no historical research has been done on the activities of the national air defence organisation, the *Unione Nazionale protezione antiaerea* (UNPA) or on



the work of the provincial air defence committees, the *Comitati provinciali protezione antiaerea* (CCPPA). Most studies of aerial warfare by scholars like Luigi Ganapini, Achille Rastelli and Giovanni de Luna,<sup>2</sup> among others, have tended to focus on civil defence in industrial and port areas. By contrast, Udine was a predominantly rural province and thus offers a different perspective. Moreover, Udine's civil defence precautions provide an insight into the kind of war Italians expected to fight.

For this reason, I have devoted two whole chapters of the PhD thesis to an exploration of early preparations for the air war including shelter building, the blackout, factory defence and evacuation. The provincial capital was a bombing target from 1943 onwards because it was a major hub for railway lines from Nazi Germany to central and southern Italy and was particularly hard and repeatedly hit during the last winter of the war.

A further aim of this PhD thesis is to investigate how civil defence was organised at provincial level. Although Italy's disastrous military performance of 1940-1943 has been much debated, historians have not been particularly interested in Italian civil defence organisations, perhaps because it is tacitly assumed that Fascism's military failures on the battlefield suggest that the regime was unable to prepare for a modern war on the home front. MacGregor Knox, for example, has argued that incompetence and cultural deficiencies within the military and within society more broadly, prevented the Fascists from imagining, much less preparing for a modern war. As a result, they failed to mobilise properly what limited resources did exist. He has also suggested that the contribution to failure of the dictator himself and the Fascist regime was great. Knox has maintained that all these factors made a decisive contribution to Italy's catastrophic defeat.

The archives of the High Court in Udine (*Tribunale di Udine*), part of the State Archives of Udine, are also potentially a very useful source for an investigation of the extent to which wartime infringements were punished by the local judiciary. Unfortunately, however, the State Archives for the period 1940-1945 are incomplete and my research has naturally been shaped to some extent by those archives which have survived the conflict; towards the end of the war, many documents from the *Gabinetto di Prefettura* were systematically destroyed by Fascists, who removed

incriminating evidence in an effort to cover their tracks. However, it is not necessarily the case that making use of this detailed but fragmentary material will undermine the usefulness of my case study. Instead, it has tended to dictate the focus of my research. The surviving documentation rendered it impossible to attempt an exhaustive treatment of all aspects of the home front in this area. I have opted, therefore, to focus in particular on a series of important and interesting themes, on which good documentation can be found.

The scope of my research has been much enriched by the fact that a mass of new primary sources have recently been added to the State Archives in Udine, including the Archive of the Court of Assize (*Corte di assise di Udine*) and some reports from the Chief of Police for 1940-1945. After obtaining special permission from the Prefect of Udine, I was able to consult the papers of post-war trials of Fascists and collaborators, in the State Archive.

Unlike other aspects of the period 1940-1945, the documents in the State Archives of Udine tell us almost nothing about the province's experience of Allied Military Government (AMG), after the ending of the war. The reason for this is that the Allies did not leave any archives behind in the province, but took their records with them when the period of military government ended in September 1947. Therefore, I had to carry out research in the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in Washington, DC (Archives I), which houses a huge amount of documentation relating to World War II. In particular, I made use of the Records of Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II (Record Group 331) and the Records of AMG Udine. I have used a range of AMG documents, including those of the Office of the Provincial Commissioner, 1945-46; Civil Affairs, 1945-46; Legal, 1944-47; Public Safety, 1945-47; and miscellaneous administrative records, 1944-46. These archives kept in Washington are a particularly rich source of information for my purposes as they, perhaps surprisingly, do not consist merely of Allied documents, but also include copies of many Italian files on public safety and civil affairs taken from the Prefettura and the Questura. The originals of these documents are not yet available for public consultation in the State Archives of Udine because of state restrictions or because the archivists at the Prefettura and the Questura have not handed them over yet to the state archive.



This PhD thesis consists of eight chapters plus an introduction. Chapter One is devoted to a brief introductory sketch of the social and economic structure of Udine and its history from 1871 to 1940, the year Mussolini brought Italy into the Second World War, as well as providing a brief outline of the military events of Italy 1940-43. Chapter Two starts with an examination of propaganda and the representation of the war in the province's local newspaper, *Il Popolo del Friuli*. This chapter focuses in particular on the extent to which it was possible, despite the powers of dictatorial censorship, for people to learn from local reports and press stories about the kind of war the regime expected to fight. This chapter then goes on to discuss the local Fascist Party's attempts to organise the mobilisation of women and children. This section of the chapter is based primarily on the PNF files in the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*.

Chapters Three and Four both focus on the question of air defence organisations and air raid precautions in the province using archival sources from the *Comitato provinciale protezione antiaerea* (1939-1950). This section looks at how the local authorities protected non-combatants in the province and what sort of war they expected Italy to wage. Chapter Three examines air raid precautions in a period in which the regime was expecting a short and victorious war. By contrast, Chapter Four discusses air raid precautions in 1942 and 1943 in a period when bombs were not yet falling, but when the war was clearly set to continue, and to widen. These chapters try to answer the fundamental question of why the local authorities proved so unprepared for the heavy Allied raids of 1944-45.

Chapter Five shifts the analysis of the home front to food policy and the *ammassi* campaign. As this chapter shows, agricultural communities were subject to increasing state control during wartime and this chapter examines the response of Udine's peasant-farmers and rural state officials to the regime's wartime regulations. The regime could not wage war without the willing co-operation of agricultural communities, and Fascist circulars were very clear about what rural communities had to do for the war effort. I have chosen to examine this topic because there is much useful material in the State Archives of Udine on the responses of peasants and local officials to the regime's campaign to get them to hand food over to the *ammassi*. Of course, in a society of unreliable and incomplete literacy, peasant families left few, if

any, written records of their contribution to the war effort on the home front, but the correspondence between the Prefect and local officials in rural communities sheds some light on how the peasantry responded to the war demands placed on them by Mussolini.

Chapter Six uses post-war trial evidence of detailed information about the brutality and violence of the period to describe and analyse the RSI under German occupation. Much has been written about the German atrocities in Italy, but historians have been less interested in writing about the involvement of Italians in violence which was organized by Nazis, but perpetrated by locals. In many ways, a discussion of the violence perpetrated by Italians against rural communities in their own province confirms that there was much resistance in rural areas to Nazi efforts to make Italians useful to the German war effort in 1943-1945. This is one reason the Nazis resorted to such intimidation and reprisals.

The last two chapters, Seven and Eight, examine the beginning of the Reconstruction period. Chapter Seven explores how the province was run straight after the Germans had left, through an examination of the role of Civil Affairs Officers. For this section, I have used primarily Allied Military Government documents to discuss the role those British officials had in shaping post-war society. Chapter Eight, the final chapter, deals with the punishment of collaborators and Fascists who were responsible for some of the violence and murder described in Chapter Six. For this chapter I have been able to make use of the archives of AMG which have enabled me to examine a number of post-war trials to illustrate the attitudes of the judiciary and Allied Military authorities to questions of war guilt, and individual and collective responsibility.

The PhD thesis ends in the final months of 1945, although some of the post-war trial evidence does, by necessity, come from the early months of 1946, in the period before the amnesty of June 1946.

It remains for me to acknowledge the authorities to which I am indebted. I could not have done the PhD research in Udine, Rome and Washington without a grant from the Student Award Agency for Scotland which is gratefully acknowledged.

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I would like to record my thanks to Steven Shafer for his valuable assistance at the National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, and to Jill Stephenson for many valuable suggestions and corrections. I also acknowledge the advice, support and encouragement of my PhD supervisor, Perry Willson, to whom I am principally indebted.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Perry R. Willson, 'Saints and heroines: rewriting the history of Italian women in the Resistance', in Tim Kirk and Anthony McElligot (eds), *Opposing Fascism. Community, Authority and Resistance in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 180-198.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra: Milano 1939-1941* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1988), Achille Rastelli 'I bombardamenti aerei nella seconda guerra mondiale: Milano e la provincia' in *Italia contemporanea*, 195 (1995), 309-42, and Giovanni De Luna 'Torino in guerra: la ricerca di un'esistenza collettiva' in Bruna Micheletti and Pier Paolo Pioggio (eds), *L'Italia in guerra 1940-43. Annali della Fondazione«Luigi Micheletti»* (Brescia: Fondazione«Luigi Micheletti», 1990-1), 885-902.

CHAPTER ONE  
THE SETTING: THE PROVINCE OF UDINE, 1871-1940

Italy is today one of the world's most prosperous and advanced industrial nations, but during the Fascist period much of the country was poor, backward and agrarian. In the period 1935-1938, per capita income was roughly a quarter of that in Britain and half that in France.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Italy was thirty to fifty years behind Germany in becoming an industrial society and illiteracy embraced perhaps a third of the population in 1940.<sup>2</sup>

In the years following the unification of Italy, the province of Udine was a relatively unknown region on the periphery of the Kingdom. The province is also known as Friuli<sup>3</sup> and is geographically defined as the Isonzo basin situated in the northeast corner of Italy between the Alps and the Adriatic Sea. Its geographical borders are natural barriers: the River Isonzo marks the eastern border of the province and, to the west, the River Livenza separates it from the province of Venezia. In the north, the Alps divide the region from Austria and to the south lies the Adriatic Sea. Although the landscape is remarkably varied, there are three distinct areas: the Alps (*la montagna*), the hilly terrain (*la collina*) and the plain (*la pianura*). Half the region is mountainous terrain and, until the marshes were drained recently, the coastal areas were boggy and malarial.

The government of the new Kingdom of Italy felt an urgent need to know the economic condition of the country and many censuses were carried out in the immediate aftermath of unification. In terms of population density, it was found that the province of Udine was sparsely inhabited (74 persons per square kilometre) in comparison with many other regions, particularly the neighbouring provinces of Treviso (145 persons) and Venezia (154 persons). The only Italian provinces that were less densely populated than Udine were the mountainous regions of Sondrio (34 persons) and Belluno (53 persons). In the province of Udine, the number of inhabitants per square kilometre was low because of the mountainous area of Carnia. However, Udine's plains were much less densely populated than those of Venezia, for example.

The percentage of the local population who were illiterate is a good indication of the poverty and the backwardness of the province. Statistics for the year

1871 show that Udine was not too far from the national average and far better than some other provinces such as Rovigo. What is striking about the statistics is the high percentage of women who were illiterate in Friuli—27.88%. In no other province—and there were sixty-nine provinces at the time—did the results of the census show such a gap in literacy between men and women. In practical terms, even in the most prosperous town, the provincial capital, only one woman in four could read and write. Many children, especially girls, had no formal schooling and about a third of all children were unable to attend classes because the local school was too distant to reach on foot.<sup>4</sup>

Another striking aspect of the province of Udine in the immediate aftermath of the Unification was the high number of peasant proprietors. Many Friulian farmers owned land, tools and animals. However, this did not mean that Udine's farmers were better off than the average Italian peasant. The holdings in Udine were fragmented because of the tradition of partible inheritance, which was prevalent throughout the province, with the exception of Tarvisio on the Austrian border where property was transmitted to a single heir. Moreover, some thirty per cent of peasant proprietors owned less than one hectare of land, normally a small plot in or near the village, which could not support the average rural family. Farming conditions varied greatly depending on the physical landscape; for example, according to the results of the 1931 census, smallholdings of one hectare were most common on the plains (53% of farms) and hilly areas (31% of farms), but less prevalent in the mountainous region of Carnia (18% of farms).<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that the big disadvantage of partible inheritance was that the sheer number of proprietors with tiny holdings prevented the emergence of large-scale commercial farming typical of more modern European countries.<sup>6</sup> It did, however, mean that there were no great estates in the province.

Of course, the economy of Udine was heavily dependent on the province's capacity to move goods to markets with relative ease and industrial growth was naturally stunted in this border province because of the absence of branch lines to the major centres of the region and other parts of Italy. Significant railway development only occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1874, the Pontebbana railway running north to south was begun so that the province could transport its goods and



people throughout Europe. At about this time, Udine became an important railway hub when the town was connected to Sacile and Latisana (through the towns of Palmanova and San Giorgio di Nogaro), Cormons, Cividale and Pontebba. A tram service linked Udine to San Daniele, and Casarsa and Portogruaro were linked with branch lines. This meant that the province's railway lines were connected to the Veneto and the national network, and to the Austrian network. As a result, the province had a better economic infrastructure and the movement of goods, previously restricted, was now unfettered.

In the province, local political elections from the Unification to the First World War were dominated by the Liberals. The Catholic vote aligned itself with the Liberals and, although the Catholics did not participate fully in national elections until 1904, they were involved in local government elections (*elezioni amministrative*). In 1895, the majority of elected members of parliament in the province were deeply conservative Liberals. In 1900, the first Catholic politician in the province was elected to the national parliament. However, it was not until the elections of 1904 that the Catholics participated fully in the national elections in the four seats of Udine, San Daniele, Tolmezzo and Gemona. It should be noted that the Catholics agreed to give their votes to government candidates in return for state support of the Church's local interests. That said, election results were problematic for the Catholics during this period because three of the four seats in the Diocese of Udine were firmly in the hands of Jewish politicians—a situation that was denounced by the local Catholic broadsheet, *Il Crociato*. During the years 1900-1914, there was a steady increase in the number of Catholic local councillors (*consiglieri*) and Catholic mayors in Udine. By 1913, Udine had two Catholic members of parliament, but it was not until after the First World War that the Catholic political movement began to make much real impact in the province.

## THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The war of 1915-1918 effectively completed the unification of Italy through the conquest of Trento, the Brenner Frontier, Trieste and Austrian Friuli, but the fighting had profound and devastating consequences for Udine. In these turbulent

years, the border province suffered much more from the direct effects of the battles than almost any other in Italy. Friulians retained bitter memories of the First World War, in particular the Austrian occupation of 1917, which represented a catastrophe for the population and the economy. Victory was bought very dearly in Friuli; some 50,000 children under the age of ten died as a result of malnutrition and disease caused by the war. Moreover, 15,165 civilians were killed during the battles and skirmishes on Friulian soil, and more than 130,000 local people were forced to flee from the region following the Austrian breakthrough at Caporetto.<sup>7</sup>

The First World War also imposed severe pressures on Friulian agriculture. Both the Italian and Austrian armies' consumption contributed to shortages as troops on both sides were detailed to requisition food and draught animals from the peasantry. Virtually all the farm animals in the province were either slaughtered by the armies or requisitioned during the Austrian occupation of 1917-1918. Of 194,835 cattle recorded by the 1908 censor more than 180,000 were requisitioned. Of the 22,691 horses in the province before the conflict less than 2,500 survived the war. The results of the 1919 census show that of the 64,460 pigs previously kept in the province only some 6,000 were left after the Austrian occupation.<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath of the war, the full gravity of the problems facing the province emerged from a survey by local government officials into war-related crimes committed by the Austrian army against the civilian population of Friuli.<sup>9</sup> However, it should be noted that the Italian occupation of the region was also characterised by brutality and oppressive rule; for example, between November 1918 and July 1919, the Italian army interned some 150,000 people in an attempt to Italianize the region by suppressing Slovene and Croatian nationalism and pre-empting rebellion.<sup>10</sup>

As in the rest of Italy, the immediate post-war period was marked by persistent unrest. Local politics were dominated by two parties, the *Partito socialista* and the Catholic *Partito popolare*. In Eastern Friuli, which had been under Hapsburg rule, the Italian victory flattened the Liberals who had both been pro-Austrian before the war. The Catholic organisations of the *Consorti agrari* and the *Casse rurali* were also destroyed by the war because the local clergy had also supported Austria and many parish priests were exiled by the new Italian authorities as a result. By contrast, the Socialists, who had emerged from the war as a relatively minor force, were able

to re-establish their organizations (the *Camere del Lavoro*, the *Casse del popolo*, the *Cooperative operaie* and the *Casse Ammalati*). The *Partito socialista* which intended to play a major role in the reconstruction of Eastern Friuli, was quick to organise peasant land occupations and strikes. Giuseppe Tuntar, director of the *Cassa Ammalati di Gorizia* and a member of the national party leadership was the main Socialist leader in Friuli. Despite, or because of, the military occupation of Eastern Friuli by the Italian army, the Socialists gained popularity in the province. This was mainly due to the creation of workers' organisations, the *Cooperative operaie*, which were able to offer food at the official price and the *Casse Ammalati* which were able to provide a sort of health insurance for peasants and workers. After the land occupations and strikes, which took place in many parts of Friuli between 1919-1920, the agricultural workers' organisation (*Federazione provinciale dei lavoratori della terra*) managed to secure a contract for field hands (*patto bracciante*) which forced their employers to recognise the Socialist unions.<sup>11</sup> The authorities and landowners had shown themselves willing to make concessions, probably because peasant activism in Udine had taken them by surprise. In any case, the events of 1919-1920 were an indication of a new political awareness among the peasantry. The local peasant movement, however, had little real power and the peasants were neither united nor effectively organised in the province.

#### THE RISE OF FASCISM IN THE PROVINCE OF UDINE

The reconstruction of early Fascism in Friuli has been made difficult by the regime itself which re-wrote the early history of the party for propaganda displays in the 1932 National Exhibition (the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista*). There was of course a national dimension to the rise of Fascism in Friuli and hence there are only a few significant differences between local and national trends in this period.

Early Fascism in Friuli was heavily influenced by D'Annunzio's remarkable rebellion in Fiume and the flamboyant style of his nationalist politics. In fact, the first meeting place of local Fascists in Udine was the offices of the nationalist organisation which represented Italian interests in Istria, *La Rappresentanza per il Friuli della Reggenza italiana del Carnaro*.<sup>12</sup> A local branch of the *Fasci di*



*Combattimento* was founded 26 October 1920 by Ugo Ravazzolo, a railway worker and Giuseppe Castelletti, editor of the newspapers *Il Friuli Fascista* (1921-22) and *Il Popolo Friuliano* (1924-25). Among the prominent local supporters of early Fascism were Gino Covre, an accountant, and Pier Arrigo Barnaba, a landowner, who, by 1924, was a member of parliament and a member of the Fascist Grand Council. Barnaba, who displayed skill and opportunism in holding the movement together, was also the Podestà of Udine during most of the Second World War

By 1921, the Udine PNF had some sixty members including many nationalist students and veterans of trench warfare, according to the party's official documentation. It should be noted that the local branch of the PNF in Udine worked very independently in the early period and there was little formal correspondence with the party headquarters in Milan. In the Fascist propaganda exhibition, the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista*, the lack of early co-ordination was attributed to the presence of Bolshevik saboteurs in the post and telegraph office who had supposedly intercepted PNF mail. In May 1921, to broaden the struggle against Socialism, a group of women headed by Lia Dorta established a local section of the *Fasci femminili* to assist with PNF propaganda and 'support the war veterans of yesterday and today and defend the victory, sacrifice and the honour of the dead'.<sup>13</sup> According to the Udine PNF, by May 1921 there were some 500 Fascists in the provincial capital (*Fascio udinese*) and some 1,000 members in other parts of the province.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the relatively tiny number of Fascists, the movement had a significant impact on the 1921 elections mainly due to the tactics of local Fascists who used trucks of armed Fascists from nearby towns to foment street violence in the city of Udine. The first of a series of paramilitary assaults in the province occurred on 20 February 1921.<sup>15</sup> The armed gangs of Fascists, who were anti-ecclesiastical, defaced churches with PNF slogans and attacked members of the Catholic youth organisation, *Gioventù cattolica*, which presented itself as leaning to the left. On the evening of 16 May, the Fascists, sensing that the police were less of a threat than had at first seemed the case, petrol-bombed the offices of two broadsheets, *Il Friuli* and *La Bandiera Bianca* which belonged to the Catholic *Partito popolare*. When Gino Covre and Giuseppe Castelli were arrested the next day, Udine was invaded by gangs of Fascist thugs from Veneto and Trieste, who occupied the town from 18 to 20 May

and their actions were condoned, even supported, by important members of the police and civil authorities. At about this time a group of the more left-leaning Udine Fascists wrote to Mussolini to protest about the hardcore elements in the party whose violent tactics were alienating some of Fascism's right-wing support.<sup>16</sup> During this period, the Socialists and Catholics accused the Prefect and the representatives of 'law and order' of supporting the Fascists; for example, the Fascist candidate, Ugo Ravazzolo, had a police escort of officers from the Questura and carabinieri.<sup>17</sup> The Fascist movement in Friuli was still relatively small when, in 1922, the King asked Mussolini to form a government.

The rise of Fascism in the province of Udine was helped not only by the fear of socialism but also anti-Slavism. In fact, during the period 1922-26, the Fascist movement organised a campaign for an enlargement of the province of Udine to include the borderlands of Gorizia. The initiative was designed to reduce the importance of the Slav population in the relatively small province of Gorizia by absorbing this ethnic minority into the much larger and more Italian province of Udine. Thus Fascism in Friuli was somewhat different from that in other parts of Italy due to this ethnic dimension.

There was friction between the Catholic Church and the regime over the education of children which the Fascists tried to monopolise. Furthermore, some parish priests were actively opposed to Fascism; for example, in 1927 five local priests were sent into internal exile (*confino*) by the judicial authorities. However, there can be little doubt that one reason for the success of Fascism was that many Catholic supporters transferred their allegiance to the PNF in the years after 1922. The Church and prominent local Fascists collaborated on a morality campaign in 1929. Among other things, the campaign criticised women who rode bicycles, especially men's bicycles. Furthermore, the Archbishop of Udine, Giuseppe Nogara, appealed to Friulians to vote in the regime's elections of 1930 that were completely undemocratic.<sup>18</sup>

Also characteristic of the Fascist system in the 1930s were the PNF affiliated organisations designed to build consensus for the regime. The *Opera nazionale dopolavoro* (OND) was created in 1925 and was controlled by the PNF from 1927. There were no alternative organisations for people because Udine's Fascist gangs

had destroyed the socialist organisations (*le case del popolo, le cooperative, le società di mutuo soccorso socialiste*) during and after Mussolini's rise to power. Friulian industry, however, was fragmentary and backward and therefore the OND in Friuli was different from that in some more industrialized areas because it was mainly organised by municipalities and urban districts rather than in factories. In fact, in 1936 there were only four OND sections established in local factories. By contrast, there were 457 *dopolavoro comunali* and *dopolavoro rionali*, 34 brass bands, 47 theatre companies, 19 orchestras and 60 sports fields, and 37 libraries.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the OND was one of the most important institutions for building consensus in the province. In 1929-30, the number of OND members increased from 16,000 to 19,000, whilst PNF membership increased from 11,000 to 12,000. The Udine section of the *Opera nazionale balilla* (ONB) was created in 1926 for children and rapidly grew reaching some 106,182 members by 1936. In 1937 the organisation became the *Gioventù italiana del littorio*.

During the period 1911-31 the local population increased by some 90,000. In 1911, according to official figures, for every 100 inhabitants, 11 were employed in industry. In 1916, for every 100 inhabitants, 16 were employed in industry. However, the censuses of the industrial work force in 1927 (42,329) and 1939 (63,188) showed that local industries developed very slowly during the Fascist period<sup>20</sup> and it was not until the 1950s that the province experienced intensive industrialisation.

In 1936, the Fascists decided to strengthen state control of agriculture by introducing new laws requiring farmers to hand over certain kinds of produce to state collection depots for a fixed price. For example, all cocoons (for silk), grain, rapeseed, and castor oil plants were to be handed in at the depots.<sup>21</sup> The new Fascist laws caused some resentment among farmers who expected to be able to trade freely and directly with consumers. Moreover, this drive for autarchy meant more state involvement in the economy,<sup>22</sup> which irked many rural communities.

The social problems of the province did not go away during the Fascist period. In fact, unemployment and under-employment were rife not least because of rural over-population. Many families received annual remittances and savings from male relatives living abroad, which alleviated some of the worst poverty. The 1931

census recorded between 40,000 and 50,000 people unemployed out of a population of 787,598.<sup>23</sup> According to an article in *Il Popolo del Friuli*, the local industrial sector remained stagnant in the period 1911-27 in terms of its structure and work force.<sup>24</sup> Such problems only got worse after the world economic depression from 1929 onwards.

One notable social problem, according to the historian Annamaria Vinci, was the high levels of crime among women, another sign of the poverty and social deprivation in the region. The courts never referred to the work of the *Fasci femminili* which appeared to be unable to reach out to the rebellious women, accused of abortion, infanticide, assault, theft from fields, and smuggling. In 1932, 2,997 women were put on trial in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and 5,112 appeared before judges in 1933. The trials offered a very different image of women's lives from that conveyed in Fascist propaganda and in the teachings of the Catholic Church.<sup>25</sup> During the first half of the 1930s, the regime similarly appeared to be concerned about juvenile delinquency, but was unable to resolve the problem. Minor theft was common and usually blamed on hunger. In 1928, for example, there were so many malnourished children in the region that those under eight years of age were not allowed to take part in PNF parades.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1930s most of the inhabitants of the province could be described as *contadini* (peasants), a very varied group which was united by its general poverty and low social status. In Fascist Italy the term *contadini* embraced a broad range of different figures that included small landowners as well as sharecroppers, landless field hands and temporary labour or *braccianti*. The term *contadini* was also used to refer to commuting workers who lived in rural areas and who farmed a few fields to reduce food costs and to sell small amounts of vegetables, salami or sausages to supplement the family income. *Contadine* (female peasants) had a large role in farming despite the fact that they were sometimes referred to as housewives. When the term *contadini* was used to refer to landowners, it normally meant small farmers with a family-sized holding. By contrast, big farmers were not referred to as *contadini* but *agrari*. They had a very different social status and income.

Most Friulian peasants worked the fields by hand or with draught animals. The peasants' cooperatives (*cooperazione agricola*) helped farmers acquire machines

together as it was known that mechanised farming could reduce the overall costs from about 400 lira to 210 lira per hectare.<sup>27</sup>

Table 1.1. The Working Population of the Province of Udine, according to the 1936 Census.

	Agriculture	Industry	Others	Total
Mountains	33,222 55.43%	18,409 30.71%	8,304 13.85%	59,935
Hills	46,177 54.86%	25,886 30.75%	12,106 14.38 %	84,169
Plains	103,020 53.6%	51,966 27.04%	37,193 19.35%	19,2179
Province	182,419 54.24%	96,261 28.62%	57,603 17.1%	336,283

Source: Lorena Vanello, 'L'agricoltura friulana tra le due guerre mondiali' *Storia contemporanea in Friuli* 9 (1978), 92.

During the Fascist period, the province of Udine was divided up into 172 administrative districts known as *comuni* (communes), some of which were towns, while most were relatively small rural communities, the basic unit of Friulian society. The *comuni* were for the most part self-governing and were able to pass bylaws (*leggi comunali*), collect local taxes, and adjudicate in matters relating to local property and land disputes. An important measure which particularly affected rural areas was the abolition, by the laws of 4 February and 3 September 1926, of local elected councils, headed by a mayor or *sindaco* and their replacement by a *Podestà*. The *Podestà* was appointed by Rome on the nomination of the local prefect and assisted by a small advisory council of Fascist Party members. The figure of the *Podestà*, which was consistent with the heavily centralising and anti-democratic



principles of Fascism, put many of the villages back in the hands of the nobility and large landowners.

#### ITALY'S WAR

The Second World War was the challenge the regime had supposedly been preparing for since taking over power and was to provide a crucial testing-time for Fascism. The First World War had clearly demonstrated how vital mass mobilisation was to successfully wage war, but during the course of the Second World War there was no all-out armaments programme, still less a general mobilisation of the nation's economic and social resources.

Mussolini was not immediately sympathetic to the Nazi rise to power in Germany and Hitler was initially viewed with much suspicion. Mussolini sent troops to the Brenner Pass when the President of Austria, Dolfuss, was assassinated on 25 July 1934. But Fascist Italy was drawn to Nazi Germany after the invasion of Ethiopia and the Rome-Berlin Axis was established on 24 October 1936. Italy abandoned the United Nations on 11 December 1937 and participated in the Spanish Civil War on the side of General Franco (1936-1939). On 12 March 1938, Mussolini sanctioned the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany.

Most of the causes of Italy's humiliation in the war have been explained by historians through the presentation of the economic realities. The Axis coalition of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan possessed half the economic power of its enemies,<sup>28</sup> and, once the war was set to continue and to widen, this imbalance could only result in destruction, defeat and disaster for the Axis powers. Moreover, within the Axis coalition, Italy was by far the weakest partner and, unlike Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan, could not subsidise its war effort by plundering the economic resources of occupied territories.

In reality, the Italian Divisions were not that much inferior to those of other belligerent nations and it was only after the Blitzkrieg of 1940 that the importance of mechanised warfare emerged. The real problem was that Italy's war aims were beyond the capabilities of its armed forces; for example, the Fascists demanded the French territories of Savoy, Nice, Corsica, Tunis and Djibouti but only Djibouti

made sense since it was an important port for Ethiopia, whilst the other territorial claims were clearly designed to humiliate France and were of no strategic importance in the war.

Moreover, one of Italy's war aims, the expansion of an African Empire, including Egypt and Suez and the Sudan could only have been possible with the defeat of the British Empire. Another important aim, expansion in the Balkans, was highly implausible given that Nazi Germany fully intended to control this region. By contrast, Mussolini failed to launch attacks against the British naval bases at Alexandria and Gibraltar or the island of Malta, relatively easy targets which should have been military priorities for the regime. Indeed, it was from the military bases in Gibraltar, Malta and Alexandria that the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force were able to control the skies and decimate Axis shipping on sea routes between Italy and North Africa. Suez and Gibraltar became choke points that reduced Italian imports.

It was not merely strategic failure which doomed Italy's war. Early interpretations blamed the personal nature of Mussolini's rule for the regime's inability to organise and direct the war effort, but more recently historians have laid emphasis on the cultural and organisational failings of Italian society, especially the armed forces which lacked a military culture.<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that the imperviousness of much of Italian society to modernity, the prevalence of illiteracy or semi-illiteracy and a weak sense of nation state were crucial cultural factors which severely limited Italy's ability to wage war. On the outbreak of war, Mussolini assumed the office of Minister of War and the Commandership in Chief of the Armed Forces, a position constitutionally held by the monarch. Thus important military decisions were made by the Duce alone. The absence of a properly co-ordinated machinery of military and political consultation was fatal to the conduct of the war. Worst still, there was no conceptual or organizational framework for inter-service co-operation until 1941-42.

In Fascist propaganda, at least, the regime was a totalitarian one and the conflict was a revolutionary war of internal as well external conquest. The constitutional anomalies of the regime, however, made it impossible for the regime to ever really be totalitarian. Unlike Hitler whose power was virtually unqualified, Mussolini was head of government and head of the party in power, the PNF, but the

King remained head of state and the regime was based on precarious compromises between Fascism and the monarchy, and the constitutionally separate army, the *Regio esercito*, which owed its allegiance to the king.

Germany's easy victories in Norway, the Low Countries and France in the late spring and early summer of 1940 led many Italians to believe that the war would be a short one. Moreover, the apparent superiority of Italy's armed forces had been hammered into Italians by pre-war media and poster propaganda and during the war this line was continued and embellished with the regime's progress reports of the Axis powers' military successes. Although it is true that most, perhaps all, Italians entered the war reluctantly, the regime's propaganda twisted reality in a plausible fashion and convinced the majority of Italians that the regime could win the war quickly and easily and that victory was just around the corner. It must be remembered, however, that distortions of the truth were built into the regime's whole communication system at every level, most of all within its upper echelons; this meant that ministries and local government authorities became themselves the foremost believers of the regime's own propaganda. In short, the authorities as well as ordinary people had a totally unrealistic impression of the war.

Mussolini abandoned his status as 'non-belligerent' ally of Germany and brought Italy into the war on 10 June 1940. On 21 June Italy invaded France. The nominal military offensive against France from 21 to 24 June was particularly ignoble given that France had already fallen to the German armed forces and was, at this stage, waiting for the armistice. The French Armée des Alpes in fortified positions fought well and Italian losses amounted to 1,258 dead and 2,631 wounded in comparison with only 20 French dead and 84 wounded.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Hitler refused to let Italy settle the historic claims of Nice, Corsica and Tunis which had in part brought Italy into the war. In fact there was no Axis occupation of Tunis in French North Africa.

It is worthwhile remembering that Italy was effectively at war from 1935 to 1945. It participated in the Ethiopian War 1935-41, the Spanish Civil War 1936-39 and the Second World War 1940-45. However, it was only the Second World War that revealed the extent to which the regime was unprepared for a major conflict. The Italian forces were deficient in equipment, especially anti-aircraft defence guns, and



mechanised transport. They possessed no modern artillery and tanks and they had lost equipment and war material in the Ethiopian War and the Spanish Civil War, material which had not been replaced by 1940. Only nineteen divisions of the army out of seventy-three were at full strength. In a war without fixed fronts, machines were low on the army's list of priorities. In particular, there was a shortage of effective medium tanks and the 'armoured divisions' were not armoured in any accepted sense. Army air reconnaissance units were initially equipped with biplanes which were no match for modern fighters like the Spitfire and the Hurricane.

There was no full-scale mobilisation in 1940. Instead, men were called up in stages and the actual number of men in the army varied from about 1,300,000 to 1,800,000. In fact, in October-November 1940, 600,000 men were demobilised. In theory, local military headquarters were responsible for the mobilisation of men between 19 and 70 and the PNF was responsible for the mobilisation of boys between 14 and 18 and women between 14 and 70. In practice, however, only a small number of unemployed Italians were mobilised by the Fascist Party because the regime assumed that the war would be a short one and that mass mobilisation was wholly unnecessary. Women were never properly mobilised at all. As De Felice has noted, at this point, the PNF was already beginning to discuss problems associated with the end of a victorious conflict and 'demobilisation.'<sup>31</sup>

In 1940, Italy expected that the invasion of Great Britain, Operation 'Sea-Lion', was imminent. Mussolini wanted the Italian armed forces to participate in the invasion of Britain and sent 75 BR.20 bombers to enter the fray. Technical problems, however, meant that four aircraft were lost during the flight from Italy to Belgium.<sup>32</sup> The failure to defeat Britain in September 1940 began to undermine the myth of an invincible Germany.

On 28 October Italy attacked Greece. Only eight small divisions, which were deficient in equipment, took part in the offensive. Of the 140,000 troops in Albania only 80,000 actually participated in the war. This was because Mussolini and the army general staff expected little opposition from the Metaxas dictatorship. The Greek army, however, rallied and checked the Italian invasion force in difficult mountain terrain and deteriorating weather. On 14 November, the Greeks mounted a counter-offensive and defeated the bulk of the Italian forces and captured a quarter of

Albania. The catastrophic defeat of the Italian armed forces in Greece and the inglorious stalemate in Albania seriously damaged the regime's prestige and threatened its internal stability. The failure to defeat Greece and the steady retreat into Albania produced a rapid decline in public morale and brought an end to the illusion of a short war. Hitler came to Mussolini's rescue and overran Greece and Yugoslavia in April 1941, but it meant that Italy's strategic independence, the so-called parallel war, was irretrievably lost. From this point on, Italy was not only totally subordinate to its ally but also the regime was now increasingly dependent on Nazi Germany for its survival.

Meanwhile, the Italian navy still hoped to dominate the central Mediterranean, despite the fact that a third of the Italian merchant fleet, 1,216,000 tonnes out of 3,300,000, had been lost with the declaration of war on Great Britain and France.<sup>33</sup> Britain was determined to hold the Mediterranean however, and the seizure of Suez and Gibraltar would have depended on the performance of the army not the navy. In any case, the navy had to rely on forces beyond its control for oil supplies, and once the Suez Canal and the Straits of Gibraltar were closed, Italy became totally dependent on Nazi Germany for the import of industrial raw materials.

Meanwhile the British struck the Italian fleet at Taranto on the night of 11-12 November from Swordfish torpedo-bombers from the carrier *Illustrious* and sunk half the regime's capital ships at anchor, *Littorio*, *Duilio*, and *Cavour*. The ships had no anti-torpedo nets because the navy thought the water level in harbour was too low for torpedo-bombers. Italy suffered another naval disaster when British Mediterranean forces under Admiral Cunningham destroyed three heavy cruisers, *Pola*, *Fiume*, and *Zara* in night action off Cape Matapan on 28-29 March 1941. The battleship *Vittorio Veneto* was also badly damaged with an aerial torpedo in this engagement.

Mussolini now hoped that an operation on the Libyan border against British forces in Egypt would secure a position at the armistice negotiations with a defeated Britain. In September 1940, the Italian army invaded Egypt with seven infantry divisions but halted at Sidi Barrani and dug into positions some 80 kilometres inside the border. In December 1940-February 1941, the British counter-offensive

recaptured Cyrenaica and took 130,000 Italian prisoners. 1300 guns and 400 tanks were captured or destroyed. In terms of propaganda value, it was the most disastrous military defeat for the Italians as the columns of prisoners, who were filmed and shown in British newsreels, confirmed the stereotype of the Italian soldiers as cowardly, demoralised and ready to capitulate. Mussolini's obstinacy in fighting his own 'parallel war' led to the rejection, on more than one occasion, of German armoured reinforcements. In the spring of 1941, the Italians lost Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia. Fascist Italy's East African Empire was no more.

Air raids on Turin and Milan (June 1940) and the naval bombardment of Genoa (9 February 1941) revealed the regime's inability to defend even its own domestic territory. Intensive Allied bombardment of Italian cities and the problems of evacuation of damaged areas and of rationing added to the war weariness of the population and began to produce sharp pervasive criticism of the regime. The entry of the United States into the war threatened a massive Allied intervention in the Western Mediterranean and on the Atlantic coast of French West Africa.

After the Allied landing in French Northwest Africa in 1942, the war came even closer to Italy. Soon afterwards, the rulers of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria began to contact Rome about the possibility of negotiating a separate peace with the United States and Great Britain. The invasion of Sicily in July 1943 marked the end of the Fascist regime which had in any case already lost most of its popular support.

#### Endnotes to Chapter One

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<sup>1</sup> Valerio Castronovo, *Storia economica d'Italia. Dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 324.

<sup>2</sup> MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny. Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 148.

<sup>3</sup> The name Friuli is synonymous with the province of Udine. It is somewhat confusing that Udine province is named after the town of Udine.

<sup>4</sup> Giulio Mellinato, 'L'Evoluzione economica della provincia di Udine (1866-1915)', in *Il Friuli. Storia e società. Il processo di integrazione nello Stato unitario, 1866-1914*, edited by Alberto Buvoli (Pasian di Prato: IFSML, 2004), 71-73.

<sup>5</sup> Lorena Vanello, 'L'agricoltura friulana tra le due guerre mondiali', in *Storia contemporanea in Friuli*, 9 (1978), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Mellinato, 'L'Evoluzione economica della provincia di Udine (1866-1915)', 107.

- <sup>7</sup> Annamaria Vinci, 'Il fascismo al confine orientale', in Roberto Finzi, Claudio Magris and Giovanni Miccoli (eds), *Storia d'Italia. Le regioni dall'Unità a oggi. Il Friuli - Venezia Giulia* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2002), 384.
- <sup>8</sup> Vanello, 'L'agricoltura friulana tra le due guerre mondiali', 70.
- <sup>9</sup> The six-volume report was entitled *Relazioni della R. Commissione d'inchiesta sulle violazioni del diritto delle genti commesse dal nemico*.
- <sup>10</sup> Vinci, 'Il fascismo al confine orientale', 393-4.
- <sup>11</sup> Giampaolo Valdevit and Mauro Pascolat (eds), *Friuli e Venezia Giulia. Storia del '900* (Gorizia: IRSML Libreria Goriziana, 1997), 194-95.
- <sup>12</sup> Vinci, 'Il fascismo al confine orientale', 403.
- <sup>13</sup> Ordine del giorno Udine, 21 May 1921, ACS, MRF, b.42, f.113, sf. 566, Udine.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter from Segretario Amministrativo, Fasci di combattimento, Milan to Fascio Udinese di Combattimento, 4 May 1921, on delivery of badges and party cards, ACS, MRF b.42, f.113, sf. 566, Udine.
- <sup>15</sup> This is according to a speech in late April 1921 by Udine's PNF *Segretario*, Gino Covre, to the *Assemblea del fascio udinese*, in *La Patria del Friuli* 29 aprile 1921, cited in Tessitori, *Storia del partito popolare in Friuli, 1919-1925*, 166-167.
- <sup>16</sup> ACS, MRF, b. 42, f.113, sf. 566, Udine.
- <sup>17</sup> Tessitori, *Storia del partito popolare in Friuli, 1919-1925*, 165-168.
- <sup>18</sup> Flavio Fabbroni, 'Friuli 1927-1940: organizzazione del consenso', in *Storia contemporanea in Friuli*, 9, (1978), 35.
- <sup>19</sup> Fabbroni, 'Friuli 1927-1940: organizzazione del consenso', 44.
- <sup>20</sup> *Enciclopedia monografica del Friuli-Venezia Giulia. 2. La Vita economica* (Udine: Istituto per L'enciclopedia del Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 1972), 80.
- <sup>21</sup> Vanello, 'L'agricoltura friulana tra le due guerre mondiali', 132.
- <sup>22</sup> Castronovo, *Storia economica d'Italia. Dall'Ottocento ai giorni nostri*, 329.
- <sup>23</sup> Andrea Leonarduzzi, 'Il Fascismo locale in Friuli', in Luigi Ganapini (ed.), *La storiografia sul fascismo locale nell'Italia nordorientale* (Udine: IFSML, 1990), 47.
- <sup>24</sup> 'La struttura economica e demografica della provincia di Udine' in *Il Popolo del Friuli*, 6 July 1934 cited in Fabbroni, 'Friuli 1927-1940: organizzazione del consenso', 17.
- <sup>25</sup> Vinci, 'Il fascismo al confine orientale', 501-2.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.
- <sup>27</sup> Vanello, 'L'agricoltura friulana tra le due guerre mondiali', 98.
- <sup>28</sup> MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2005), 250.
- <sup>31</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. I. L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. I. Dalla guerra «breve» alla guerra lunga* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 99.
- <sup>32</sup> Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943. Dall'impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta*, 256.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

CHAPTER TWO  
MOBILISATION AND PROPAGANDA: EARLY PREPARATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS,  
SUMMER TO WINTER 1940

This chapter focuses on aspects of the situation in Udine during the first months of the war. It starts by looking at what people learned about Italy's readiness for war through local newspaper articles which appeared before the Italian army in Greece suffered catastrophic defeat in the winter of 1940-41. This first section deals with how the war situation was portrayed in the local press and focuses specifically on the most detailed source of information about the war, *Il Popolo del Friuli* (usually referred to as *Il Popolo*) which was the most important daily broadsheet printed and published in the province during the Fascist period. Like most local newspapers in Italy at the time, *Il Popolo* was far more widely read in the province than national newspapers. The civic library in Udine has a complete run of *Il Popolo* for the war period, as the collection in the *Biblioteca Civica* survived the heavy air raids of 1944-45. The historian Luigi Ganapini has argued that broadsheets are a problematic source of information about Italy's war in that the editorials of newspapers were controlled by the regime.<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, true but the press is useful in trying to understand what Italians at the time knew about the war.

The second part of this chapter examines the local Fascist Party's attempts to mobilise women and children for the war effort. The First World War had set a precedent of a very important kind. It had shown that mobilising civilian workers was crucial to the manufacture of weapons and other military hardware. Yet there were no banner headlines in *Il Popolo* about a general mobilisation in 1940. Even though historians have been puzzled by the lack of full-scale mobilisation in Italy, there has been little research into local efforts by the PNF to mobilise Italians.

In the absence of written records, it is impossible to do justice to other important sources of information in Udine about the war, including foreign radio broadcasts and the dramatic accounts circulated by soldiers on leave. Also, there were other equally important forms of propaganda, notably local radio broadcasts, cinema newsreels and PNF pamphleteering, and articles in other national and regional newspapers which were also to be found on sale, in particular *Il Gazzettino* and *Il Popolo di Trieste*. But I have browsed through many issues of other



contemporary broadsheets in Trieste's civic library and they are invariably little more than a different selection and arrangement of the same official material from the Ministry of Popular Culture or Minculpop.<sup>2</sup> It therefore seems plausible to argue that although the fact that a number of different newspapers were on sale may have given some the impression that people could read more than one version of the war, in reality, this was totally untrue.

Also, local entertainment in the form of opera, theatre, and concerts was an important part of Fascist propaganda as it alleviated the stress of war and sustained morale on the home front. A recent article on Fascist censorship claimed that cultural issues were secondary to the regime's political concerns in the early years of the Fascist regime.<sup>3</sup> This may indeed be the case. However, it is also true that the distinction between political and cultural issues was less clear-cut during the war because entertainment frequently contained a political message or served a political purpose.

It is, of course, very difficult to know the extent to which Italians really believed all they read in the press. One factor which may have increased the apparent reliability of papers like *Il Popolo*, however, was the fact that although, unquestionably, Fascist propaganda manipulated the truth, Minculpop had to provide some facts and figures to maintain credibility, especially when discussing the organisation of the home front. In addition, Minculpop was sometimes forced to publish detailed, and more or less accurate, information about the war, for example after the first RAF bombardment of Turin on the night of 11-12 June, because it was reacting to popular rumours and scaremongering. Therefore, *Il Popolo* often contained sections of relatively truthful information blended in with bogus claims.

#### 'IL POPOLO'

*Il Popolo* was a typical provincial daily paper. It had front-page, banner headlines of national or international news, and a local two-page section inside which frequently reported on preparations for war, including the activities of the local section of the Fascist Party. Udine's coffee-houses, taverns and social clubs usually provided a copy of the broadsheet for customers to browse through and so the paper reached out to far more people than its circulation figures alone suggest. However,

the newspaper's influence was clearly far greater in urban areas than in the countryside due to high levels of illiteracy among the peasantry.

One obvious reason why some historians have been dismissive of Fascist propaganda in comparison to Nazi propaganda is that the wars of Fascism and Nazism were very different. Whilst Nazi Germany fought three world powers to the bitter end and only suffered invasion in the last year of the conflict, the Italian war effort disintegrated after early and catastrophic military defeats. Cultural differences, moreover, have shaped the judgement of some non-Italian historians who have written about this. Adrian Lyttleton and MacGregor Knox, among others, have argued that Italy in the 1930s was about forty years behind Germany in becoming an industrial society. Much of the early historical writing on the Fascist press contained the quasi-racist Anglo-Saxon assumption that Italian propaganda was really too farcical to do much harm. However, I believe that, although of course, it would be wrong to argue that the broadsheet produced fanatical loyalty, this does not necessarily mean that Italian journalism was unimportant as an instrument of coercion and consent.

Similarly, it has long been a common-place among Italian historians that Fascist propaganda was cruder and less effective than Nazi propaganda.<sup>4</sup> The suggestion here is that propaganda had less impact on Italians who were, consequently, less committed to the war. Other historians have drawn attention to the fact that Nazi Germany provided the Italian press with propaganda material,<sup>5</sup> and while this research is important, such studies ultimately serve to diminish Italy's own responsibility in the war and thus side step questions about national war guilt. *Il Popolo* was, however, far from simply a mouthpiece for Nazi propaganda. The fact, for example, that Udine's paper did not have a strong anti-Semitic tone in the early part of the war, suggests that the Fascists did not by any means simply publish all the material syndicated from Berlin, but selected appropriate topics before reprinting German articles. Moreover, it is worth noting that English newspapers, notably *The Times*, were also filleted by the Italian press for material which could be re-written as Fascist propaganda. One example of this is the fact that *Il Popolo* reprinted Royal Air Force and Royal Navy official losses which had first been published in *The Times*.

Ironically, *The Times* was arguably a much better source of information for Fascist propaganda than German broadsheets because of the relatively detailed and free debate in the English-language press about the conduct of Britain's war. In July, for example, *Il Popolo* reported that the British were preparing to combat an invasion and had even bought a few aeroplanes from the United States, according to *The Times*. This article in *Il Popolo*, written before the Land-Lease agreement between the British and Americans had been reached, correctly pointed out that Britain was under-equipped to defeat Nazi Germany, and went on to suggest that the British government was in an increasingly desperate situation. *The Times*, according to *Il Popolo*, had recently suggested in its editorial that the war situation was much more serious than the British government had previously claimed.<sup>6</sup> Fascist propaganda, therefore, was often a re-writing of information from other press sources, but with editorial cuts that gave articles a very different slant. Superficially, the articles must have seemed similar to the columns of short notices sent by 'our special correspondent' (*nostra corrispondenza particolare*) from abroad which had hitherto been a prominent feature of Italian journalism. It follows that the cleverly re-written articles may have created the illusion that Italians could read other foreign press sources about events, sources which appeared to confirm the regime's version of the war.

The summer of 1940 was a period in which the vast majority of the local population only experienced the war in the pages of Fascist broadsheets or newsreels. It was also the period of Germany's stunning victories in the west; victories which meant that there was little need for Fascist Italy to fabricate the military successes of the Axis powers. In the summer of 1940 people could read about how, in a matter of days, the German Panzers had swept through Luxembourg, Belgium and northern France. Dunkirk was gleefully but accurately reported in *Il Popolo* as a sensational military defeat for Britain. Moreover, people in Udine could read that the fighting was gradually becoming more distant from Italy. By July the front-line was in the southeast of England.

In early August, the Italian army invaded British Somaliland and captured the outposts of Karora, Gallabat, Kurmak and Kassala. *Il Popolo* wrote that 285 British aircraft had been lost in the defence of British Somaliland, the first colony to fall to



the Axis forces.<sup>7</sup> By mid-August the broadsheet was reporting that the British forces had been defeated and were evacuating by sea.<sup>8</sup> The invasion of British Somaliland was described as a decisive blow against the British Empire 'which had been unable to prevent the earlier conquest of Ethiopia, and was now unable to prevent further expansion of the Italian Empire'.<sup>9</sup> In many ways, articles like these that appeared in *Il Popolo* conveyed rather accurately just how tenuous Britain's position was in 1940. Moreover, the easy invasion of Somaliland and the crossing into Egypt suggested that Britain was not a formidable enemy and this was the kind of war most people in Udine expected to fight. Clearly, these military events gave no forewarning of how tough the war against Britain was going to be for Italians.

It should also be remembered that the war Italy waged in the first six months of the conflict was very different from that fought by the Italian army in Greece in the winter of 1940-41. In the early period of the war, the Italian soldiers did not fight in a land campaign in Europe. In practice, Italy's German ally did all the fighting in the West and it was natural that people in Udine would be less concerned about the war because Italian troops were obviously not required. Hence many aspects of people's daily routine were unaffected by the pressures of the conflict that were being experienced in other belligerent nations. This explains why the Podestà of Udine decided that it was still possible to put on a season of opera at the Odeon theatre, and there were no changes to the programme. The local Fascist organisation for University students (*Gruppi universitari fascisti* or GUF)<sup>10</sup> staged some of the plays of Luigi Pirandello, in whose theatre truth is by nature contradictory, unfathomable, and in part constructed by the actors themselves. This Pirandellian theatre, including the one-act piece *Lumie di Sicilia* (Sicilian Limes), was written before the Fascists seized power, but the notion that truth was inaccessible no doubt served the purposes of Fascist propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

Nor did Europe's descent into barbarism cast a baleful shadow over the local football fixtures; young men continued to play well-attended matches and received enthusiastic press coverage. In August, while Italian forces invaded British Somaliland, the local football association (*Associazione Calcio*) announced that the 1940-41 season would go ahead as usual and then published the much anticipated changes to the local team, Udinese, in *Il Popolo*. The only really disappointing news

for readers was that two popular players, Degano and Tabanelli, were to leave the side, but they had not been drafted, merely transferred to another team, Fiorentina.<sup>12</sup> Once the season began, beneath an article about the Duce's much publicised tour of reserve armoured units in Friuli, there appeared a large photograph of an exciting moment during the match between Udinese and Brescia in which the Brescia goalkeeper warded off an attack by Mian, Rossi and D'Odorico. The brief article concluded that the Udine team had been 'unjustly beaten 1-0'.<sup>13</sup> This apparent normality no doubt reinforced public perception that many aspects of life would continue to remain untouched by the war.

It could also be argued that even wartime football was a form of propaganda in that it reassured people that the regime's war of foreign conquest would not cause turbulence in many aspects of people's lives. Moreover, in the pages of *Il Popolo* the football field was only apparently in contradiction with the battlefield since much of the press, in typical Fascist style, described the war in sporting terms as a confrontation involving attack and defence, competitiveness, and strength in adversity—all vivid, healthy emotions, according to the Fascists. More to the point, football was entertainment, which the regime considered an important form of propaganda in that it sustained civilian morale.

Another feature of the regime's propaganda should be noted. Newspaper articles often more or less truthfully reported facts but deliberately confused cause with effect. Thus a correspondent for *Il Popolo*, who was apparently reporting from France and Belgium, wrote that the Nazi organisations there were providing medicines, food and clothing, thus preventing refugees from starving to death. The picture of German invasion in the local Fascist broadsheet was one of a benevolent conquest.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the *Technische Nothilfe* (TN) was cited as an example of how the German armed forces were reconstructing France. This article misleadingly described repair and reconstruction as humanitarian aid when in fact the TN was part of the German police services (*Ordnungspolizei*) and had a military not civil role in the occupation of France.<sup>15</sup> In typical fashion, this article presented the destruction caused by aerial warfare against the civilian population as the result of futile resistance rather than Nazi aggression. In this way, resistance was a sufficient

explanation for the bombing of Amsterdam and Warsaw, and was to be blamed on its inhabitants who had refused to capitulate.

Three days after Italy entered the war, *Il Popolo* reported that Turin had been bombed on the night of 12-13 June. This was the first article in *Il Popolo* which provided people in Udine with some evidence that Italy was vulnerable to air attack. The newspaper reproduced verbatim the military dispatch from the army high command which stated that the Italian air force had been in action in Ethiopia; bombers had attacked a British airfield at Biserta and Italian fighters had shot down six enemy aircraft without losses, and that British bombers had attacked Turin, which was described as an open city (*città aperta*), a meaningless term implying that a city with war-related industries had somehow been mutually recognised as a non-belligerent or demilitarised zone. The broadsheet reported that during the two-hour raid, British bombers had dropped about thirty bombs from a height of 6,000 metres, destroying houses and a market place. Fourteen civilians were reported to have been killed. According to *Il Popolo*, this long and supposedly accurate report on the bombing of Turin demonstrated the regime's desire to be as honest as possible about the war situation.<sup>16</sup>

It is possible, however, to hazard a different explanation for this apparent honesty if this particular RAF raid on Turin is contextualised. The aerial bombardment of Italy's largest industrial city occurred on the same day that German troops in France breached the Maginot Line while other motorised units entered Paris—and Fascist broadsheets triumphantly reported the blitzkrieg breakthrough and encirclement the next day with sensational headlines and genuine euphoria. De Felice is probably correct in noting that, after these events, many Italians who had been sceptical about Mussolini's decision now believed that the Axis powers had more or less won the war.<sup>17</sup> *Il Popolo* continued to publish Royal Air Force and Royal Navy official losses and quoted both *The Times* and *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* to give the impression of a balanced account of the war between Britain and Germany. *Il Popolo* left readers in little doubt that Britain was losing the war and that the British Empire's power, based on military supremacy, was visibly disintegrating.<sup>18</sup> A few bombs dropped on distant Turin, in this context, seemed little to worry about for the readers of *Il Popolo*.

During the war the local section of the Fascist Party was not supposed to make statements about air defence including evacuation. It should be noted that it was the Prefect, not the PNF, who submitted important articles and announcements to *Il Popolo* that informed the public about local air defence matters and other aspects of the home front on a need-to-know basis. If party hierarchs had been allowed to organise evacuation and air defence or publish stories about evacuation as propaganda, it would have given the PNF a much more significant role on the home front, but, as it was, the War Ministry insisted that only the Prefect could make statements in the press.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the job of making important announcements about the home front was kept firmly in the hands of the War Ministry and the Interior Ministry. PNF officials were relegated to the role of mere technical consultants who provided people with advice on how best to implement ministerial air raid precautions and other regulations. By October 1940, the Prefect was already severely criticising the party's role in air defence, especially its inadequate efforts to inform people about wartime regulations, including the all-important shelter obligations, which led him to insist that the party's role in air defence should be very limited.<sup>20</sup>

Mario Isnenghi has suggested that Fascist propaganda was in the realm of fairytales and that the war which emerged from the pages of PNF broadsheets like *Il Popolo* was an imaginary war without realism.<sup>21</sup> Similarly Aurelio Lepre has maintained that the regime claimed that its anti-aircraft guns represented an almost impossible barrier for enemy aircraft.<sup>22</sup> *Il Popolo* did indeed sketch this sort of picture on the front-page, but long articles on the inside pages frequently conveyed a far more accurate impression of the nation's war preparations. For example, people could read about the technological poverty of Italian artillery pieces on the home front. The newspaper quite candidly admitted that the anti-aircraft guns in use in Udine remained those of 1915-18 and were to be fired by local volunteers, veterans of the First World War, who were too old for the draft (the oldest volunteer serving on an anti-aircraft gun crew in Udine had previously seen action in the Libyan campaign of 1911). Even though the anti-aircraft gunners were blackshirts (*camicie nere*) it was not an elite force in any accepted sense. In fact, the broadsheet even went on to suggest that the anti-aircraft batteries which had seen action in three wars, would most probably be ripped to shreds when the first anti-aircraft salvos gave their



positions away to enemy bombers, 'sending the gun crews to meet their Maker' (*li manda al Creatore*).<sup>23</sup> The point is that the local press made a virtue of these deficiencies by writing that Fascism's best men and artillery pieces had been deployed on the battlefield. Hence, 1915-18 equipment and soldiers on the home front were to be seen as a sign of the regime's total commitment to the battlefield rather than its lack of preparation for war. To see the war in this way was to assume that, in a war of foreign conquest, Italy did not need a heavily guarded home front.

Mario Isnenghi has also argued that discussion about the technology required to fight a modern war was wholly absent from the Fascist press, but this does not seem to be the case in Udine. Editorials in the local PNF broadsheet discussed at length technical aspects of the war. For example, in the columns of *Il Popolo* it was quite clearly admitted that the regime could not use aviation against night attacks; the Italian air force had no fighters to intercept enemy aircraft flying at night and had to rely on heavy searchlights to locate bombers. Readers could surmise that Italy had no integrated air defence system because bomber detection was in the hands of the army and the militia, not the air force. The broadsheet also provided 1915-18 statistics to point to the limitations of modern artillery weapons; for example, in July 1940 the newspaper explained that it had been necessary during the First World War to fire between 5,000 and 7,000 rounds to shoot down a single aircraft. The article effectively dismissed the notion that the air force and anti-aircraft guns offered a real barrier against aerial bombing. In short, the ballistics of aerial warfare were complicated, and to illustrate this point, the writer tried to explain why anti-aircraft batteries normally failed to hit moving targets and, worst still, why anti-aircraft salvos occasionally exploded on the ground rather than in the air. To simplify his argument, the writer provided an analogy, towards the end of the second column, for readers whose concentration was slipping: 'when a small boy throws a stone at a bird in a tree, the bird usually flies away unharmed, but the stone may well rebound onto the boy's head.'<sup>24</sup> The fact that *Il Popolo* could openly state that Italy did not have the technical means to build a defensive shield against enemy attack, clearly does seem to suggest that the newspaper had absorbed Fascist notions about a short war and, consequently, the irrelevance of effective civil defence measures.



One striking feature of *Il Popolo* in this period is the space devoted to photographs of warplanes or military hardware. Photojournalism emphasised the apparent beauty of Italy's weapons.<sup>25</sup> There were articles about the organisation of the regime's civil defence installations and its anti-aircraft defence system. People could read how lookout posts (*posti di avvistamento*, PA) passed on warnings to centres which processed the information (*centri di raccolta notizie*, CRN) and transmitted it to the local branch for air defence (*Comando di Difesa Aerea Territoriale* or DICAT) and how with telephones and teleprinters, it became an air raid warning.<sup>26</sup> Besides the official reports, *Il Popolo* ran a series of articles by first-person narrators who appeared to be privileged observers of war and who gave energetic accounts of the fighting, including much technical detail. In one report, supposedly written onboard a destroyer in the Mediterranean, the writer discussed the complex calculations needed to sink an enemy ship and demonstrated how dependent modern warfare was on the rule of technology and machines which 'had made warfare much less humanised, and reduced killing to abstract mathematical parameters and formulas. The deadly instruments of modern warfare resemble children's toys'.<sup>27</sup> These accounts suggest that wartime propaganda owed much to the ideas of Futurist intellectuals. In any case, the war correspondent's reports conveyed the idea that the Royal Navy was no longer committed to controlling the Mediterranean and that all British ships had been assigned to Britain's own defence, which was not, in fact, the case.

In the mid-1990s there was a brief flurry of interest in the importance of photography in World War Two partly inspired by the release from the United States national archives of new images of the war in Italy made by Army Film and Photographic Units. These images caused considerable public debate when the graphic reels were aired by RAI television stations for the first time.<sup>28</sup> The renewed interest in images from the war did not, however, lead to new research into images made by the Fascists on the home front. Public interest and debate revolved around the question of how accurately the Americans had portrayed the war in Italy, but not of how accurately Italians had portrayed themselves or their war.

The historian Aurelio Lepre has written that, between 1939 and 1940, the memory of trench warfare of 1914-1918 was still very much present in the public

mind and overshadowed popular notions about how the Second World War would be fought, notions that denied the primacy of technology and science in modern warfare.<sup>29</sup> This is perhaps true, but, once the fighting commenced, *Il Popolo* circulated dramatic images and text that suggested that the new war was of a very different nature. Firstly, the PNF newspaper emphasised that it was a three dimensional conflict in that combat involved the deployment of warplanes and submarines as well as tanks and battleships. Photographs of German warplanes in particular conveyed the importance of technology and military hardware and appeared to confirm that the Axis powers had superior weapons. Numerous images of the 'Stuka' dive-bombers sweeping the skies clear of opposition were used to illustrate the close teamwork of warplanes and Panzer columns in the so-called *Blitzkrieg*. Similarly, the newspaper feature 'The Air Superiority of Italy and Germany' (*La superiorità aerea dell'Italia e della Germania*)<sup>30</sup> was typical of a series of repetitive articles which aimed to inculcate the notion that the air forces of the Axis Powers dominated the skies of Europe. With freedom from enemy interception, Heinkel 111's were roaming over England in daytime causing unprecedented destruction on a massive scale. This article was illustrated with an aerial photograph of Heinkels in flight 'heading towards London on a bombing mission'.<sup>31</sup> To summarise, then, it is significant that a succession of articles in *Il Popolo* described German and Italian arms in almost mythical terms.

In a sense *Il Popolo* placed too much emphasis on the difference between the First World War and the new conflict. While it is certainly true that Italy was not a world military power, in reality other combatants had 1914-1918 equipment, too. The German army of 1940 still relied on some horse-drawn gun carriages as well as motorised units during the so-called *Blitzkrieg*, and, in an essay on the British Field Force in France and Belgium in 1939-1940, Brian Bond has pointed out that British infantrymen, in their holes in Flanders, had been equipped and trained not for a fast-moving European war but for a war not so very different from that of 1914-1918. Consequently they were unable to delay the German advance.<sup>32</sup> Thus the disparity between the First World War and the new war was not yet properly apparent in the summer of 1940. Of course *Il Popolo* emphasised the crucial differences between the two wars to convince readers that the Second World War would be a much easier

victory. This explains why many articles, in the summer of 1940, lamented that, because the home front was remote from the battlefield, civilian volunteers were essentially 'missing out on the euphoria of battle and victory.'<sup>33</sup>

There were also bogus claims reprinted from German newspapers, the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichtung*, alleging that the Nazi war correspondents had been impressed with the expertise of the Italian frigates. Thus, people learned that British domination in the Mediterranean had effectively ended in mid-July 1940, and with it the spectre of a British Navy blockade, and that Italy had gained operational superiority in a situation similar to that which had recently occurred in Norway. This article suggested that the invasion of Britain was now even more probable.<sup>34</sup>

When discussing Britain, like most Italians at the time, the editorial staff made no real distinction between Britain and England. There were articles about the war in Scotland and Wales, but Fascist propaganda reserved its peculiar invective for the elite sections of English society, people who had very little in common with ordinary Italians. Thus, Lord Halifax was portrayed as the embodiment of Britain's elite governing classes whose pursuit of war was not to defend liberty in Europe but to protect financial investments and subordinate the working-class which had been subjugated since the industrial revolution. In other words, the Fascist press suggested that the war was the fault of Britain's aristocrats who were using the conflict to stem a revolutionary tide.<sup>35</sup> But more important still, such articles suggested that the British Empire was incompatible with Italian territorial expansion.<sup>36</sup> From historical precedents cited in the columns of *Il Popolo*, for instance imperialism, colonialism and British involvement in Ireland, a Fascist reading of British history demonstrated that expansion and conflict in Europe were inevitable. The inevitability of the conflict was a crucial argument in support of the regime and its war.

An article which appeared on 7 July 1940 discussed the treatment of Friulian emigrants in Britain arrested on 10 June or the morning of 11 June after Mussolini had declared war on Britain. The article described how, although the British police had been fair, military police had mistreated the Italians and had torn up PNF membership cards and personal papers. Some had been interned in 'concentration camps' while one group had been sent from London to Glasgow, packed into a

prison ship under armed guard and had endured a terrifying journey to Lisbon during which the vessel was attacked several times by German bombers. The article concluded by reporting eye-witness accounts of the British home front, in particular public opinion about Dunkirk, which suggested that there was panic in Britain and confirmed what the broadsheet had been saying all along: the British public had lost its nerve after Fascist Italy had entered the war.<sup>37</sup>

People were probably shocked by the treatment of the emigrant Italians because, of course, *Il Popolo* made no mention of Fascist measures against foreigners in Italy. In fact, when Italy entered the war in 1940, Fascist concern about foreigners and ethnic groups in the border province of Udine rapidly intensified. Police harassment, arrest, and detention of individuals who were foreigners or not 'pure' Italians increased.<sup>38</sup> The Interior Ministry now considered foreign prostitutes, who worked in legalised brothels or from home, a security risk. There was a newly found hatred of 'gypsies' too, a term which indiscriminately lumped together Romany, Sinti, pedlars and vagrants, people who were perceived as social outsiders, and considered a potential threat to the community at war. They were to be watched, perhaps searched, and if necessary, sent to concentration camps. This order followed rumours and reports that gypsy caravans driven by foreigners, notably Yugoslavs, were approaching people and, with the excuse of selling items, spreading anti-Italian propaganda.<sup>39</sup> Records of prisoners in transit during this period show that Jews, who had escaped from persecution in Nazi Germany and Poland, were often arrested in Udine, or elsewhere in Italy, and handed over to the German authorities in Tarvisio, on the Austrian border.<sup>40</sup> Unsurprisingly, *Il Popolo* concealed this sinister information from its readers.

Articles about the British Empire, which were principally written to augment Anglophobia, worked best by careful selection and arrangement of material. One common method used in *Il Popolo* was to write about how illustrious Englishmen had criticised British imperialism, and was much more powerful as propaganda than just quoting local Fascist speeches ad nauseam. One article entitled *Confessioni inglesi* quoted Herbert Spencer's criticisms of the British invasion of Sudan and discussed British Catholic Bishops' sharp criticisms of the government's policy towards Ireland.<sup>41</sup> As can be seen from this the broadsheet frequently used comments



which had been made a long time ago and, in a very different context, to illustrate historical precedent.

#### MOBILISATION

Historians are generally agreed that the regime's mobilisation was remarkably limited. Massimo Legnani has convincingly argued that Italy's mobilisation was 'low key' (*sotto tono*) because the regime was convinced it would be a short war (*una guerra breve*) similar to previous Fascist wars.<sup>42</sup> MacGregor Knox has suggested that the regime's failure to decree general mobilisation in 1940, as its Liberal predecessor had done in 1915, was characteristic of a war effort that feared offending powerful interest groups.<sup>43</sup>

However, the lack of full-scale mobilisation during the war has meant that scholars have devoted little attention to the regime's efforts to mobilise Italians. A lone exception is an essay by Paola Ferrazza 'La mobilitazione civile in Italia 1940-1943' published in the journal *Italia contemporanea*. Ferrazza argues that Fascist mobilisation was only in part shaped by the course of the war, and is better understood in terms of a coherent but concealed policy to discriminate against certain sections of society.<sup>44</sup> This essay, which suggests that mobilisation was of real significance to the regime, attempts to discredit De Felice's version of the war which saw Fascism's efforts to mobilise the nation as of little or no importance.<sup>45</sup>

In Udine's case, it was possible for people to read between the lines and understand that nothing had been done in June 1940 in terms of a general mobilisation for the war and that consequently there were no results to publish. The *Federazione Provinciale dei Fasci di Combattimento* which was supposed to organise the mobilisation of civilians through its *Centro Mobilitazione Civile* (MC) was given the task of creating a register of the province's labour resource to replace the millions of working men who were to be conscripted into the armed forces. The PNF was made responsible for the mobilisation of boys and girls between 14 and 18 years old and women between 18 to 60 years old who did not have to care for children. There was a division of labour—adult men who had been exempted from military conscription were instead mobilised by the *Consiglio Provinciale delle Corporazioni*, not the local Fascist Party.



Italy's mobilisation orders were self-consciously racist: 'non-Ayrians' were barred from conscription, air defence and war-related industries. Jewish men in particular were not to be drafted into the armed forces. Paola Ferrazza has suggested that, ironically, this was in many ways a privilege rather than a punishment.<sup>46</sup> This, however, was only superficially true for it can be argued that this Fascist policy sent a powerful message to society; Jewish men, women and children were thus classified as worthless to the nation and not part of the community at war. Moreover, the fact that this group of people was excluded from the war effort, undoubtedly paved the way for further discrimination and persecution later in the conflict. After all, many Jewish communities had high-achievers who would certainly have been shamed by fellow Italians about not getting involved in the war or the home front. It should be also mentioned that Romany and other groups in society classified as 'gypsies' were similarly excluded from the province's labour pool.

In many respects, it was misleading of the local branch of the PNF to call their work mobilisation; the party's mobilisation office did not conscript and deploy boys and girls in industry or channel them into agriculture. Nor did it draft women in gender specific occupations like secretarial work and nursing into the armed forces. Rather, the small group of volunteers filled in forms with personal details (*scheda personale*) and compiled a provincial register of people who were not in regular, paid employment outside the home and who therefore could be recruited to fill gaps on the home front. Thus *mobilizzazione* is a misleading term in Fascist Italy. It should be made clear that wartime mobilisation was not labour conscription at all; rather it was a national census of the labour pool. Some historians have used the term lazily, but mobilisation was a misnomer because it was intended, initially at least, to involve no more than paperwork—the compulsory registration of civilians at the local mobilisation office.

Lack of funds in part explains the limited nature of Udine's mobilisation, for the regime had scarcely budgeted for its plans. In the month Italy entered the war, the local branch of the PNF mobilisation office estimated that it had received only about a twelfth of the money it needed to fund its information-gathering activities. Paola Ferrazza states that the PNF obtained generous funding for the mobilisation of women and teenagers,<sup>47</sup> but the evidence from the files of the PNF in Udine suggests

that hardly any of this money actually reached Friuli. PNF correspondence from Udine shows that the regime supplied the empty forms and call up papers, but the local branch of the Fascist Party had to fund all other aspects of mobilisation, including the all-important propaganda, which was a very costly activity. The local Fascist official responsible for civilian mobilisation, Aldo Fantini, wrote in the days before Italy entered the war that the PNF in Udine needed at least six regular paid clerical workers to cope with the extra paperwork for mobilisation. He estimated that the Udine section would have to complete more than 100,000 forms. However, because of a lack of funds, the mobilisation centre was eventually staffed by just a few volunteers.

By November 1940 Fantini admitted that progress had been very slow, and blamed the regime for its reluctance to finance or support mobilisation in Udine. According to Fantini, the regime had failed to anticipate the sheer numbers and had only sent about 54,500 mobilisation forms, far from enough. According to PNF records, the number of girls, boys and women in the province who were supposed to have forms was over 240,000 (about 210,000 women and 32,000 children) of whom only 150,000 had had their details collected by the local branch.

Worse still, the administrator responsible for the office claimed that completed *schede personali* were not categorized or filed in cabinets, but, as late as May 1941, lay scattered in boxes on the office floor or on tabletops. Documents show that with minimal funding and no encouragement from Rome, the Mobilisation Centre became an embarrassment to the party and was eventually shifted from its headquarters to 'a room in a private apartment which the PNF rented from a local woman'.<sup>48</sup> This suggests that local Fascists themselves believed the information-gathering organisation was of no real value to Italy's war preparations and that the nation would not actually ever need the services of the 210,000 women and 32,000 children. Evidence from the Mobilisation Centre in Udine suggests that the lack of mobilisation was not due to cultural or organisational failings, but rather to the notion that *mobilizzazione* really only had a propaganda value.

In this period, nonetheless, the local *Fasci femminili* did organise training courses to prepare and educate women about the demands of the home front and these courses were as much publicised as the actual mobilisation. The 1915-18 war

had shown that ordinary civilians would have to make sacrifices as part of the national war effort, and courses were designed to teach wartime cooking and house keeping and to serve the policy of autarchy by teaching women efficiency and thrift. For example, women who attended a Domestic Science course learned how to cook rabbit, liver and giblets as a substitute for red meat and to bake cakes without sugar. Courses taught women from affluent households to view renouncing red meat as a wartime necessity. To intensify the war on waste, women learned to repair shoes and make slippers with material which had been salvaged. Women's courses also involved some indoctrination, as well as 'preparation for the colonial life' should Italy's territorial conquests provide a new role for them in the Empire.<sup>49</sup>

But numbers were tiny. The local women's organisation has left little record of its courses, and we need more study of this aspect of mobilisation, but it is clear from the articles in *Il Popolo* that very few women actually attended the *Fasci femminili* evening classes. The courses tended to idealise the role of women on the home front. Women would have to give up the luxury of city life and become thrifty housewives cooking rural dishes and making do with existing clothing. For urban women, the war would be nothing more than a brief descent into the idealized and self-sufficient world of the peasantry with its traditional values so much admired by Fascism.

Paradoxically, the local *Fasci femminili* were saying that all housewives would have to make the same limited sacrifices on the home front, but, in reality, the courses demonstrated that the true meaning of domestic sacrifices was entirely subjective and heavily dependent on social position. It is clear from newspaper reports that the women who attended the courses were party cardholders from the urban elite and therefore neither typical nor representative of the majority of Udine's population. The very content of the courses, too genteel for the vast majority of working-class women who viewed red meat and new shoes as rare luxuries even in peacetime, detracted from any popular appeal and were thus of little or no value.

Moreover, what the Udine *Fasci femminili* were saying was a contradiction in terms. That living standards in the province could improve through sacrifices and warfare, was clearly at odds with *Fasci femminili* appeals to women who were already affluent to become thrifty-homemakers. True, the PNF organised evening

courses in schools for the future needs of the war, including teaching women to operate civil communications equipment and drive trams, but again numbers who attended were tiny. One report in *Il Popolo* stated that twenty members of the *Fasci femminili* were attending the part-time course in Udine designed to prepare women for the demands of modern warfare. Moreover, the broadsheet's statement that 'the public would have to wait to read the results of this enterprise', could be interpreted as meaning that nothing of importance had been achieved to date.<sup>50</sup>

In a sense, mobilisation orders appeared unnecessary in Udine because whole sections of society were ostensibly already mobilised in that they participated in the PNF which was the party in power and at war. Furthermore, people probably believed that active involvement in the political and organisational life of the local PNF demonstrated a readiness to obey orders from the party leadership, including a general mobilisation.

Thus the statement that mobilisation in 1940 was remarkably limited should be qualified. After all, how could the PNF suggest that there were large numbers of people who were not already in the party or the armed forces or in war-related industries and therefore available to be mobilised? One can conclude that wartime mobilisation was a very sensitive matter for a party which tried hard to convince people that Fascists were in a permanent state of readiness for war. This explains why mobilisation was presented as nothing more than compiling lists of children and housewives. It did not signify immobility since the nation was supposedly already mobilised for war, as it were. Moreover, *Il Popolo* claimed that general mobilisation was unnecessary because so many 1915-18 war veterans had come forward, without coercion, to free young men for redeployment on the battlefield that fewer unwilling and inexperienced Italians were needed. In early July, the local branch of the Fascist youth section (*Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* or GIL) was actively discouraging boys from joining its newly formed battalion. Although the GIL stated that it appreciated the enthusiasm of the town's young Fascists, the battalion did not want to accept more volunteers.<sup>51</sup> People were therefore encouraged to think that it was not as important to mobilise civilians for the present conflict as it had been during the 1915-18 war. It is worth making a further point: although on paper many 'housewives' in rural areas had no regular income outside the home and could therefore be mobilised,



in reality they were constantly occupied. They had to do a considerable amount of farmwork as well as looking after children and frail relatives. In peasant households, moreover, children of both sexes were also expected to do farmwork in the time before and after they attended school. Thus much of the peasantry was in fact exempt (*esentati*) from civil mobilisation orders because it was clear to the party that, in the case of Udine, in practice, the vast majority of rural women and children had no spare time (*non possono disporre del proprio tempo*) to contribute to the Fascist war effort.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, in discussing the lack of mobilisation, it is worthwhile remembering the fact that thousands of Italian peasants were mobilised to work in Nazi Germany during the early phase of the war. Italians with farming experience were billeted on German farms to replace German agricultural workers who had been drafted into the army or into war industry. Here the story was different. Police reports show that special trains with hundreds of Italian workers passed through Udine every day on their way to Nazi Germany throughout the period 1940-42. Evidence from the Questura reports suggests that the voluntary recruitment of Italians was highly organised, and the campaign, which received publicity in *Il Popolo*, undoubtedly contributed directly to the Axis war effort since Germany was short of labour. In practice, the Italian peasantry freed German agricultural workers for the draft.<sup>53</sup> This is an aspect of mobilisation which is easily overlooked.

In conclusion, it is best to recall that Italy did not initiate, or even take part in, any major land battles in Europe in the first six months of the war. Newspaper propaganda in Udine conveyed a triumphant, euphoric mood about the course of the war that must have convinced many people that preparations on the home front were scarcely relevant, especially full-scale mobilisation. The strength of this propaganda owes much to Nazi Germany's easy victories and something to Italy's invasion of British Somaliland. When a full view of the early war is taken, in a period when even Churchill was suggesting that a German invasion of Britain was by no means inconceivable, then full-scale civilian mobilisation must have seemed wholly unnecessary for an apparently short war. Also, it made little sense to have full-scale mobilisation whilst the Italian army, which was not fighting a major land campaign in Europe, remained inactive. It is, therefore, quite plausible to argue that the



preparations for mobilisation which occurred in Udine were sufficient for the kind of war Italy expected to fight in the period 1940-41, a war that actually lived up to Fascist propaganda. This point is easily overlooked because the regime was so overwhelmed by later military events. The example of Udine suggests that we should treat with caution arguments of those like MacGregor Knox, who suggest that the absence of preparations and mobilisation should be attributed primarily to the cultural and organisational failings of Italian society at large or to a weak sense of nation state.<sup>54</sup>

## Endnotes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra: Milano 1939-1941*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> The Ministero della Cultura Popolare (abbreviated to Minculpop) was established in 1937 to exercise much greater control over the press, particularly in terms of foreign news, Fascist culture and propaganda. Minculpop replaced the Ministry of Press and Propaganda (Ministero per la Stampa e la Propaganda) which had been founded in 1935. Previously, the Prefetturas had acted as local press censors.

<sup>3</sup> Guido Bonsaver, 'Fascist Censorship on Literature and the Case of Elio Vittorini', in *Modern Italy* 8 (2), (2003), 165.

<sup>4</sup> However, in 1991, at an important conference in Parma on Italy's war, some Italian historians disagreed with the central argument of a paper given by Paola Olivetti 'Il Linguaggio dei cinegiornali: Germania e Italia' that Nazi propaganda was much more sophisticated. See Roberto Botta, 'Il Novecento degli Istituti. Ricerche sulla partecipazione dell'Italia alla seconda guerra mondiale', in *Italia contemporanea*, 185 (1991), 702.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Jens Peterson, 'L'organizzazione della propaganda tedesca in Italia 1939-1943', in *L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943: Annali della fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, 5, 681-708.

<sup>6</sup> 'Come Churchill giustifica il bombardamento delle popolazioni civili', *PdF*, 26 July 1940.

<sup>7</sup> 'Il confine della Somalia Britannica varcato in diversi punti delle nostre colonie', *PdF*, 8 August 1940.

<sup>8</sup> 'Gli inglesi in rota cercano scampo sulle navi', *PdF*, 20 August 1940.

<sup>9</sup> 'La fulminea avanzata italiana in Somalia e le sue ripercussioni sul destino dell'impero inglese', *PdF*, 10 August 1940.

<sup>10</sup> The *Gruppi universitari fascisti*, founded in 1921, was the first local Fascist youth organisation. The GUF was supposed to be a cultural organisation for an elite group of young people who would provide Italy with future leaders. The town of Udine did not have a university during the Fascist period, therefore young people attended the Universities of Trieste or Padua.

<sup>11</sup> 'Teatro GUF: Pirandello', *PdF*, 13 December 1940.

<sup>12</sup> 'Udinese 1940-41', *PdF*, 8 August 1940.

<sup>13</sup> 'L'incontro Udinese-Brescia', *PdF*, 9 October 1940.

<sup>14</sup> 'L'opera di assistenza nazionalsocialista dei Paesi occupati', *PdF*, 30 July 1940.

<sup>15</sup> Sometimes referred to as the Teno, the TN was a strike-breaking organisation founded in 1919 and used for the repression of the working class. Later it was incorporated into the German police in 1937. During the war, the organisation performed engineering functions for forward echelons of SS units.

<sup>16</sup> 'L'incursione aerea nemica su Torino', *PdF*, 14 June 1940.

<sup>17</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. I. L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. 2. Crisi e agonia del regime* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 683.

- <sup>18</sup> 'Come Churchill giustifica il bombardamento delle popolazioni civili', *PdF*, 26 July 1940.
- <sup>19</sup> Circular on the evacuation of the urban population from Il sottosegretario di Stato (undersecretary for war), General Ubaldo Soddu, to all ministries, the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, and the PNF, 27 May 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>20</sup> Prefect to the Interior Ministry, October 1940, Report on UNPA of Udine, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>21</sup> Mario Isnenghi, Adolfo Mignemi, Daniele Mor, Pier Paolo Poggio, Gianni Sciola (eds), *L'Italia in guerra 1940-43. Immagini e temi della propaganda Fascista* (Brescia: Fondazione Luigi Micheletti, 1989), 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Aurelio Lepre, *Le Illusioni, la paura, la rabbia. Il fronte interno italiano 1940-1943* (Rome: Edizioni Scientifiche italiane, 1989), 58.
- <sup>23</sup> 'La Milizia Artiglieria Contraerea: Uomini e cannoni per la difesa del Paese', *PdF*, 12 July 1940.
- <sup>24</sup> 'Canoni contro aeroplani', *PdF*, 19 July 1940.
- <sup>25</sup> 'Offrire un libro ai soldati che combattono', *PdF*, 13 December 1940.
- <sup>26</sup> 'La Milizia Artiglieria Contraerea: Uomini e cannoni per la difesa del Paese'
- <sup>27</sup> 'I cannonieri della nave', *PdF*, 18 August 1940.
- <sup>28</sup> See for example Paolo Ferrari and Achille Rastrelli, 'Immagini della seconda guerra mondiale', in *Italia contemporanea*, 201 (1995), 715-729.
- <sup>29</sup> Lepre, *Le Illusioni, la paura, la rabbia. Il fronte interno italiano 1940-1943*, 5.
- <sup>30</sup> 'La superiorità aerea dell'Italia e della Germania', *PdF*, 8 August 1940.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Le aquile del Reich all'assalto di Londra', *PdF*, 8 August 1940.
- <sup>32</sup> Brian Bond, 'The British Field Force in France and Belgium, 1939-40', in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds), *A Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 41.
- <sup>33</sup> 'L'alto elogio del Duce alla Milizia Artiglieria Controaerei', *PdF*, 2 August 1940.
- <sup>34</sup> 'La fine di un mito', *PdF*, 18 July 1940.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Perchè si batte la Gran Bretagna', *PdF*, 12 September 1940.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Imperialismo britannico e Impero italiano', *PdF*, 20 August 1940.
- <sup>37</sup> 'Le angherie britanniche nei racconti dei friulani tornati ieri dall'Inghilterra', *PdF*, 7 July 1940.
- <sup>38</sup> The level of wartime arrest and detention of individuals in Udine also depended on the amount of prison space available and, of course, the danger to the public. Moreover, detention of foreigners affected only 18 to 60 year olds, and foreign members of the clergy were allowed to leave Italy without hindrance.
- <sup>39</sup> TUC, P, 1940 (45), 10/13 June, ACS, MI.
- <sup>40</sup> Udine Prison Register for 1940, Carcere Giudiziarie di Via Spalato. The enormous register for 1940 can be read from 2 March onwards. The first part, including January and February, has been damaged by water and is illegible.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Confessioni inglesi', *PdF*, 31 July 1940.
- <sup>42</sup> Massimo Legnani, 'Guerra e governo delle risorse. Strategie economiche e sociali nell'Italia 1940-1943', in *Italia contemporanea*, 179 (1990), 229-261.
- <sup>43</sup> MacGregor Knox, 'The Italian Army at War, 1940-43: a study in combat effectiveness', in MacGregor Knox, *Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 149.
- <sup>44</sup> Paola Ferrazza, 'La mobilitazione civile in Italia 1940-1943', in *Italia contemporanea*, 214 (1999), 22. Although Ferrazza discusses the impact of Axis defeats on Italian mobilisation she does not explore the equally important impact of the early victories on the regime's plans for a general draft.
- <sup>45</sup> See Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini L'alleato. I. L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. I. Dalla guerra «breve» alla guerra lunga* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 557.
- <sup>46</sup> Ferrazza, 'La mobilitazione civile in Italia 1940-1943', 35.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.
- <sup>48</sup> Aldo Fantini to Giovanni Montefusco, 8 June 1940, 21 June 1940, 6 November 1940, 1 May 1941, on civil mobilisation, ACS, PNF, Direttorio Nazionale, serie II, b.1644, f. Provvedimenti Mobilitazione civile.
- <sup>49</sup> *PdF*, 14 August 1940.
- <sup>50</sup> 'Mobilitazione civile', *PdF*, 12 July 1940.
- <sup>51</sup> 'GIL, Domande arruolamento volontari', *PdF*, 11 July 1940.

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<sup>52</sup> 'La disciplina dei cittadini in tempo di guerra', *PdF*, 11 June 1940.

<sup>53</sup> See for example the numerous daily reports in ASU, Gab. Pref., b.30, f.123, Questura di Udine, Relazione mattinale, 1942-3.

<sup>54</sup> Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, 2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS 1:

#### UNPA, URBAN AND RURAL DEFENCE, JUNE 1940 TO MAY 1941

This chapter, together with the next one, focuses on civil defence preparations in Udine, in particular the work of the air defence organisation *Unione Nazionale protezione antiaerea* or UNPA.

On the few occasions when air raid precautions have received scholarly attention, studies have mostly tended to focus on how the Italians were largely unprepared for the big raids of 1942-45. There is also some research looking at civilian attitudes and behaviour in air-raid shelters as part of a wider discussion on the level of consensus for the regime and the war.<sup>1</sup> We still know little, however, about how Italians organised themselves for civil defence. There is some limited historiography in Italian such as a brief section in journalist Miram Mafai's book *Pane Nero* published in 1987,<sup>2</sup> and in Aurelio Lepre.<sup>3</sup> None of these, admittedly few, works, go into the history of UNPA in any depth and nothing whatsoever has been written on civil defence in Udine. This chapter attempts to begin filling in the gap by exploring what was done in Udine in the early period of the war.

In Udine, the Prefettura turned its attention to the question of air defence immediately, by publishing a detailed list of air raid precautions in *Il Popolo* only a day after Mussolini brought Italy into the war. These measures, however, had only a limited impact, mostly because the blackout precautions were introduced in midsummer when businesses, including shops, normally closed long before sundown. Anyway, it was not a draconian code and some war regulations, for example a new rule that private motorcars had to slow down in urban areas, affected only a tiny number of affluent people. The real importance accorded to these measures can, moreover, be seen in the fact that a ministerial circular which appeared in *Il Popolo* went on to suggest that masking tape on window panes could be quite decorative if applied in an imaginative fashion. This frivolous remark that trivialised the importance of air defence demonstrates that the local authorities were not much concerned with the danger of aerial warfare at this point in the war.<sup>4</sup>

In this they were not wrong. In practice there was little danger of air raids in Udine in 1940-1. The few raids that took place were quite minor and certainly were

less destructive than they were to become in late 1942. In the early period, the Royal Air Force had to fly over immense spaces and geographical barriers to bomb the 'industrial triangle' of northern Italy, and the technological difficulties of finding and marking an inland target meant that few RAF aircraft reached the target during night bombing.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the early air raids (*incursioni*) were not really air raids at all; rather, they were, in the contemporary language of the Royal Air Force, 'sorties' by one or two lone aircraft flying at night. The big RAF raids of the Second World War started in the spring of 1942 with the incendiary attacks on the German cities of Lübeck and Rostock<sup>6</sup> and most of the devastation unleashed by large formations of Allied bombers occurred after the defeat and division of Italy in September 1943. In many ways, then, the protection offered to non-combatants in Udine was, in fact, more than adequate to meet the threat posed by the Royal Air Force in 1940-1. This was far less true for the later period of the war, as shown in the next chapter.

#### AIR DEFENCE ORGANISATIONS

The organisation responsible for manning the antiaircraft batteries, which were supposed to act as a deterrent against air attacks, was the *Milizia artiglieria contraerea*. This PNF organisation was founded in 1929 for antiaircraft defence but usually went under the name of DICAT (*difesa contraerea territoriale*). In Udine, as elsewhere in Italy, gun teams were composed of Militia Blackshirts (*Camicie nere della Xª Legione*), though it should be noted that militia volunteers were ordinary middle-aged men, mostly veterans of colonial wars,<sup>7</sup> who were neither an elite military force within the Fascist Party nor a political section as the term *Milizia* might suggest. In fact, the *Milizia* had nothing to do with the blackshirted Fascist gangs which took part in the 'March on Rome'. Moreover, although the organisation was theoretically part of the *Milizia volontaria per la sicurezza nazionale* (MVSN), the *Milizia artiglieria contraerea* was subordinated to the Ministry of War during the conflict.

At provincial level, air defence was organised by a committee (*Comitato provinciale protezione antiaerea*, or CCPPA), a mixture of technical experts from the army, fire brigade, and important state officials, including the Prefect, the Chief of



Police, the Head of Railways, and the Director of Postal and Telegraph Services. The Podestà of Udine was a conspicuous member of the Committee because he represented local government in Udine, and the Committee's membership also included the leader of the provincial PNF Federation, the *Federale*, Mario Gino and a representative (*collaboratrice*) from the women's section (*Fasci femminili*).

The Prefect was President of the CPPAA and regularly received circulars from the Ministry of War and national orders from Mussolini on matters of air defence. That said, civil defence was organised essentially along military lines and the Committee was in fact subordinate to the local headquarters of the Italian territorial army (*Stato Maggiore per la difesa del Territorio*). Hence the most important figure on the CPPAA was an army officer, the inspector of provincial air defence (*ispettore provinciale antiaereo*), whose job it was to act as a liaison officer for DICAT and the CPPAA and to prepare air defence precautions according to army instructions. Although there was a CPPAA, a ministerial circular from May 1940 stated that prefects were supposed to place air defence firmly in the hands of the army officers on this Committee rather than allow Fascist Party members and local government officials to make important decisions. Therefore, in practice the inspector of provincial air defence and the secretary of the CPPAA had a more prominent role than the other members of the Committee, especially the representatives of the Fascist Party, who lacked the required skills.<sup>8</sup> It should be clear that civil defence really depended on the bureaucracies and technical skills of the territorial army not the Prefettura. The case of Udine shows that civil defence depended heavily on the commitment of reserve army officers to air raid precautions.

In fact, the inspector of provincial air defence was always and inevitably a high-ranking officer from one of the armed forces; the army (*Regio esercito*) the navy (*Regia marina*), the air force (*Regia aeronautica*), the militia (*MSVN*) or the militia for coastal defence (*M.DICAT*).<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the crucial role of the Italian army in air defence is easy to neglect because army officers used Prefettura letterheads for correspondence, though they were employed by the territorial army. It is also worthwhile noting that the CPPAA's remit did not include the dissemination of government regulations, which was the responsibility of a PNF organisation, the *Unione nazionale protezione antiaerea*, or UNPA.

UNPA was the regime's organisation responsible for dealing with air raids. Theoretically, UNPA was subordinate to the local section of the PNF<sup>10</sup> and a PNF inspector acted as a liaison between the Party and UNPA. At local level, there was an UNPA member in all urban subsections or *Gruppi rionali* of the Fascist Party. In each subsection there was an UNPA official who controlled the air raid wardens or *capi-fabbricato* in his district. UNPA was the vital link between the various air defence organisations of the regime and ordinary Italians, and its activities were controlled by the CPPAA and the Fascist Party.

The Udine branch of UNPA established its first section in 1937, but, like many other Fascist Party organisations, it suffered from a lack of funding which limited its pre-war activities to little more than propaganda. As Aurelio Lepre has noted, the lack of government finance also prevented the organisation from expanding and improving national air defence precautions in the crucial period before the war.<sup>11</sup>

UNPA was structured into two sections: the rescue parties (*gruppi di primo intervento*) who dealt with the aftermath of air raids, and the wardens or *capi-fabbricato* who were usually responsible for seeing that the public and important buildings were protected during an air raid. Although the *capi-fabbricato* were effectively the lowest rung of air defence, the pea-green membership card of the *Gruppi rionali* gave them a sense of importance as neighbourhood PNF officials.

Compared with certain other Fascist organisations in Udine, for example the *Massaie Rurali* or the *GIL* party youth organisation, membership figures for UNPA were tiny given that it had such an important role on the home front. The province of Udine had only fifteen rescue squads; 391 members who were supervised by seventeen reserve army officers who had been discharged as regular officers, but who had been subsequently retained or recalled for civil defence duties. According to *Il Popolo*, four squads were supervised by women. In addition, the province had about 500 *capi-fabbricato* at the start of the war.<sup>12</sup>

There is only fragmentary evidence about the social origins of UNPA members. The procedure for selecting recruits appears to have been *ad hoc*, but it is probable that most men who filled the technical jobs in air defence were selected from the building trades; they were carpenters, demolition experts, builders, plumbers, or similar figures with a working-class background. There is evidence that in a predominantly rural region like Friuli, rescue parties that protected urban areas also included agricultural workers. For example, of the nineteen members of UNPA rescue party protecting the town of Cervignano in a flatland area of Friuli, there were five builders, four workers, two joiners, two field hands (*braccianti*), one farmer (*agricoltore*), one artisan (*fabbro*) and two mechanics (*manovali*).<sup>13</sup> It is probable that most men were selected on the basis that they were already adept at their technical roles and we can assume that training for air defence was minimal. Some UNPA recruits, who were unemployed when they joined the organisation, were later lured away from civil defence by the promise of work, but most of its members had full-time jobs and were expected to stay on for the duration of the war.<sup>14</sup>

Although some women were included in air defence, UNPA recruited mostly male volunteers of 40 to 48 years of age, who had no liability to military service and who would probably not be conscripted into the armed forces.<sup>15</sup> UNPA was allowed to recruit a small number of males of 40 to 45 years of age, but in practice the territorial army was absorbing as many men as possible, and invariably refused to let men under forty-five serve in the air defence organisation. It should be remembered that UNPA belonged to the PNF and was not part of the armed forces and therefore its members were officially non-combatants and liable to be drafted during the war.<sup>16</sup> This explains why, in the competing claims on wartime manpower, the Prefect often had to persuade the military authorities to release UNPA members who had been conscripted into the territorial army<sup>17</sup> or mobilised for employment in industry.<sup>18</sup>

Another problem related to the selection of suitable civilians for air defence in a backward rural province like Udine was that UNPA could not find local men with the standard entry level education required by Fascist wartime regulations. On many occasions, men who had professional experience for a technical role in air defence, lacked the minimum level of schooling which was a prerequisite for UNPA organisers. The result was that Cesare Miani, the local leader of UNPA, could not

find enough candidates and the organisation was inadequately officered throughout the war.

To add to this, there was a further problem that confronted the UNPA authorities and one that was again linked to the selection of 'politically reliable men and women' for air defence. About half the volunteers appointed by the Committee to take part in the Fascist air defence organisation were in fact 'non-Fascists' who had no existing connection with the party.<sup>19</sup> For example, in March 1941, eleven of the twenty-two nominations for wardens in Udine were not PNF members, including all three women on the list.<sup>20</sup> This was a perceived problem for the local section of the PNF because the air defence organisation that emerged from the pages of *Il Popolo* was Fascist and had the resources and the authority of the Party behind it. In addition, as Emilio Gentile has pointed out, the PNF was trying hard to make Italian society more Fascist.<sup>21</sup> In theory, the district leader (*il Fiduciario rionale*) of the *Gruppi rionali* vetted applicants for UNPA and could therefore prevent the selection of non-Fascists, but, in practice, it was impossible to find UNPA volunteers exclusively from the ranks of the PNF, depleted as it was by army conscription—unsurprisingly all the young, militant Fascists who had been so prominent in the local PNF before the war were now on active service. In fact circulars from the Ministry of War show that, especially in predominantly rural provinces, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the regime to find enough male volunteers for UNPA.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, the political significance of Fascist membership had been progressively diluted by the Party leadership's policy of mass enlistment into the PNF in the 1930s. The Fascist Federation in Udine had remarkably high membership levels at the start of the war: a 298,763-strong local section out of a total provincial population of 726,384, according to official PNF figures.<sup>23</sup> However, as De Felice has written, the Fascist reverence for numbers meant that there was no sifting of candidates by the local section and PNF membership was almost meaningless. This explains why the Prefect and UNPA leader Cesare Miani always relied on the traditional police services of the carabinieri and the Questura to run checks on the political backgrounds of all local UNPA men and women rather than use the records of the PNF to vet individuals.<sup>24</sup>



It is worth suggesting that PNF membership was less important in air defence than in other party organisations because unlike, for example, the militia, UNPA was not explicitly Fascist in tone; nor was it overtly political. The purpose of the tiny organisation was not to mobilise the masses, but rather to bring 'propaganda' into the homes of ordinary Italians; and the term 'propaganda' was strictly used to denote the dissemination of wartime shelter regulations and technical advice on air raid precautions. In any case, UNPA records suggest that those who signed up for air defence duties displayed enthusiasm for a job which offered the excitement of taking part in the war and no doubt gave people a sense of importance and worth in a time of national emergency. For example, one 1940 telegram reported that UNPA recruits occasionally turned out to help the local fire brigade fight fires which were clearly not the result of enemy raids.<sup>25</sup>

In the town of Udine, UNPA was organised into the four districts of the *gruppi rionali* which covered the historic centre and public buildings. A striking aspect of the Udine's air defence is that it did not extend much beyond the historic centre of town. Udine had eight electromechanical air raid sirens connected by telephone to a civil defence command room in a building by the railway station, but on busy market days even the inhabitants of the town centre had difficulty hearing the alarm in some streets. A detailed inspection of local air raid precautions in March 1940 suggested that UNPA should improve the power of its sirens and place them further apart, presumably so that people living in housing on the outskirts could also hear the alarm.<sup>26</sup> There is evidence that the council authorities did not build public shelters in the most crowded urban areas, the working-class districts; rather, some shelters were placed in important districts of town where one could expect the professional classes to live and work. This suggests that the Fascist authorities recognised that antagonising them was potentially more dangerous for the regime. Evidence from early air raid warnings, however, shows that these council shelters were not used because the inhabitants of those districts preferred to use their own basements. Fascism was supposed to be 'going to the people' with a combination of propaganda and mass organisations, but it is possible to argue that in terms of protecting non-combatants, a disproportionate number of public shelters were built for the professional classes.



In the first month of the war, the town council built thirteen public shelters (*ricoveri di circostanza*) and dug two uncovered slit trenches (*ricoveri di trincee scoperte*)<sup>27</sup>; but, to put this in context, the shelters offered very modest protection to only 3,500 people<sup>28</sup> out of a population of more than 50,000.<sup>29</sup> Evidence from other studies suggests that the picture was similar in other parts of Italy. For example, Giovanni De Luna has noted that Turin was very ill prepared for the air war and even by 1943, this industrial city could shelter only about 25,000 people out of a population of some 600,000.<sup>30</sup>

The largest public shelters in Udine were built with timber, brick and concrete. A timber canopy was supported by brick pillars and walls. Some shelters were reinforced by covering the roof pavement and walls with concrete slabs. Tubes made of asbestos cement going up through the roof as much as six metres in height above ground level provided ventilation. There was a tap for drinking water and wooden benches fixed to the walls provided simple seating, and a small electricity generator kept the shelters illuminated. There was always at least one emergency escape exit from the shelter.<sup>31</sup> Shelters, however, had no washing facilities or bunks, and not all of Udine's shelters were equipped with first aid boxes and generators for emergency lighting. Shelters were very expensive to build and the council could not afford to spend vast sums on them. Moreover, a Ministry of War circular of May 1940 recommended that local government authorities should only build shelters if they had the labour, materials, and equipment required.<sup>32</sup>

Right from the start, in fact, the amount of shelter the council could provide was heavily reduced by several factors. A ministerial circular pointed out that, at a national level, air defence suffered from poor finance, a shortage of building materials, and inadequate legislation and therefore the council relied heavily on the good will (*buona volontà*) of ordinary Italians who were expected to fulfil the regime's wartime demands.<sup>33</sup> In another revealing letter to the War Ministry in April 1940, the Prefect wrote that the greatest obstacle to proper air defence precautions was the amount of money required to implement the regime's regulations. Perhaps not surprisingly, as a result Udine had few public bomb shelters and this led the CPPAA to use what could be found locally and to convert the town's private basements and cellars rather than construct public shelters from scratch.<sup>34</sup>

This meant shelter ultimately depended on the quality of the buildings that people lived in. Moreover, because people could not realistically shelter in a room above ground-level those who lived in the crowded tenements of working-class districts had no real protection. Certainly most of the *palazzi* in the historic centre had very strong basements and solid walls. Invariably, the buildings of more wealthy people provided much better protection from air raids than the housing of the proletariat. In the affluent area of Via Bonaldo Stringer, for example, a typical *palazzo* had a basement four metres under the courtyard with a solid staircase leading down to the cellar which, according to an UNPA inspection, provided excellent bomb shelter in the event of an air raid.<sup>35</sup> In the case of the town of Udine, the basements of middle class homes very often provided at least as much protection from air raids as did the public shelters.

#### THE BLACKOUT

The *capi-fabbricato* had the important role of policing the blackout in town which the Fascist Party divided into PNF districts or *gruppi rionali*. The first reports written by Fascist Party *capi-fabbricato* have survived the war and throw some light on popular attitudes towards the blackout and towards Fascist Party officials who were supposed to enforce the air raid precautions. For example, on the night of 13-14 June 1940, a group of *capi-fabbricato*, the *IV Gruppo Rionale*, patrolled the town and recorded blackout infringements in their own neighbourhood. On this particular evening, most of the civilian population apparently followed the regulations. By contrast, the army authorities appear to have ignored the air raid precautions that had been published by the Prefettura. For example, at the Armoured Corps barracks in Via Gaeta, two doors were left open and lights were burning in the courtyard. Other important state institutions left lights on; for example, there was a powerful red light on the railway station signal tower and there was a light on in the industrial college in Via Manzoni.<sup>36</sup>

The first few reports from the *gruppi rionali* draw attention to the attitudes of the officers and men of the Italian army. UNPA observers, who grew increasingly critical of the Italian army's wartime attitude, revealed that in sharp contrast to civilians who, with few exceptions, obeyed regulations, the town's military had

committed numerous infringements of the blackout since the outbreak of war with the result that the Prefect found it increasingly difficult to convince civilians that air raid precautions were important.

As the *Questore* commented as late as 1942, even army officers from the Infantry Regiment Headquarters were in the habit of circulating with unmasked lights during the blackout. In reality, however, there was little to prevent officers ignoring the regulations because members of the armed forces could not be fined or prosecuted by the police services of the *Questura*.<sup>37</sup> Cesare Miani suggested that the reason soldiers and civilians ignored wartime regulations was because the carabinieri and police officers from the *Questura*, who had dealt with transgressors in the first weeks of war, were no longer policing the blackout by August 1940. That the Interior Ministry decided carabinieri and other officers should not police the blackout suggests the authorities were tolerant of infringements because air raid precautions were not perceived as being important in Udine. In fact the job was given to UNPA but early accounts of the blackout patrols by local *capi-fabbricato* suggest that this PNF organisation lacked the authority of the carabinieri because *capi-fabbricato* were not granted police powers. Cesare Miani went on to argue that the UNPA patrols could perhaps wear Fascist uniforms<sup>38</sup> to improve their standing in the community.<sup>39</sup> It may also be that UNPA had less authority than the carabinieri because the *capi-fabbricato* were unarmed, unlike municipal police officers (*vigili urbani*) who carried Beretta pistols during air raids.<sup>40</sup> In any case, UNPA officials could not arrest people, and the Fascist Party was doubtless seen as being remarkably tolerant of infringements.

Another solution Cesare Miani suggested was to publish all blackout infringements, including the names of transgressors, in *Il Popolo* so that people would be shamed into following the regulations<sup>41</sup> but the military chiefs of the territorial army refused to allow UNPA to publish details of infringements committed by army personnel.<sup>42</sup> Because transgressors could not be punished, UNPA had to devote an enormous amount of energy to distributing pamphlets and posters in an effort to convince people of the importance of air raid precautions. During the first UNPA patrols, UNPA also recorded blackout infringements by police and Fascist officials. For example, the Fascist official responsible for listening into local

telephone calls left his office light on, though he managed to have the report suppressed before it reached the higher authorities.<sup>43</sup> In any event, the Prefect simply republished the air raid precautions in *Il Popolo* to remind civilians of their duties in wartime.<sup>44</sup>

Ordinary people in Udine, however, noticed the double standards. One contemporary observer, Palmiro Leskovic, who denounced infringements of the blackout in a letter to the local section of UNPA, wrote:

I was walking with a friend over the bridge which leads to Piazzale Palmanova when I saw an amazing sight: hundreds of yellow lights on the railway track, east of the station.

I don't think that these lights are absolutely necessary for trains which, in any case, run less frequently now. A few years ago, trains travelled with only a few oil lamps to guide them. There is little point in us civilians making an effort to cover up holes in windows when those who should set an example show a total lack of interest [in blackout precautions].<sup>45</sup>

Comments like this show that there was some anger that the armed forces and the military were not following air raid precautions, and ultimately encouraged people to be less responsible.

The Prefect's reports about public mood for the summer of 1940, for example, show that the vast majority of Friulians were patiently 'waiting for the defeat of Britain, a defeat that would mean victory for Italy'.<sup>46</sup> According to the Prefect's reports, the vast majority of Friulians, especially in rural areas, were not critical of UNPA's preparations for aerial warfare in 1940. In fact the regime's decision that air raid precautions were a very low priority in the province of Udine does seem to have been fully justified in the light of subsequent events in the period 1940-1942.

Furthermore, there was a deluge of propaganda in the pages of *Il Popolo* of the kind already discussed in the previous chapter which conveyed the notion that Italy's war was won and this was no doubt the attitude of the Fascist authorities in Udine. According to *Il Popolo*, Germany's air force was supposed to have destroyed Britain's air power and won air superiority over England. All the indications as

reported in *Il Popolo* showed that Britain was in a hopeless position.<sup>47</sup> In any case, the British army had little prospect of re-entering Continental Europe and establishing bases for its bomber force. Meanwhile the Italians realised that Bomber Command, the striking-arm of the Royal Air Force, could not reach very far into southern Europe.

This propaganda partly explains the small scale of Udine's air raid precautions, and why inspections by UNPA commanders in the summer of 1940 found that various authorities in Udine were not taking air raid precautions seriously; for example, many municipal fire extinguishers were not working or had not been inspected for years. The local prison was under equipped to deal with an air raid—the prison wardens had no boots, helmets, or picks.<sup>48</sup> The chief librarian had ignored Mussolini's circular and still had all the old newspapers and books in the loft<sup>49</sup> and even though the elite girls' boarding school, *Educandato Femminile Uccellis*, had a fire-fighting squad, the schoolgirls clearly did not know about their air raid duties when questioned by UNPA's inspectorate.<sup>50</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising that the regime had made little effort to protect prison inmates, but both the library and the middle-class girls' school received poor reports too, even though it would have taken very little effort and organisation to meet the UNPA standards. The library had only to clear the loft of old newspapers and books, and the school had only to devote one lesson to what pupils were to do in the event of an air raid. It is clear that provincial sources of authority refused to comply with even the most basic war regulations, measures which had often been decreed by Mussolini himself. It would be too much to claim that this amounted to a form of anti-Fascist resistance; rather, it suggests unwillingness to change one's ways and comply with the organisation of the home front. Of course part of the reluctance to obey orders can be found in local political intrigues. For example, there were no doubt power games between the Podestà, a prominent Fascist who embodied the municipal authority, and the directors of important state institutions at provincial level, who owed their real allegiances to Roman bureaucracies. Therefore, the real motive for reporting infringements of war regulations was sometimes to be found in internecine quarrels between 'good Fascists' and bureaucrats rather than in a genuine conflict between people who thought air defence was important and those who did not.



In any case, reports show that UNPA inspectors tended to view infringements of air raid precautions as a form of 'bourgeois passivity' rather than as criminal behaviour. There is no evidence in the provincial archives or prison records that the municipal police or carabinieri enforced air defence regulations by confining those responsible for disobedience to a concentration camp or detaining them temporarily in jail: preventative measures which the regime was not squeamish about using against political enemies of the state who were involved in non-violent forms of resistance. Despite the no-nonsense talk in the press about the seriousness of war regulations, there was no heavy sentencing or other stiff penalties for law-breakers; in other words the police did not criminalise infringements of air defence regulations. The state police, a force with enormous powers in wartime Italy, failed to play a significant role in preventing infringements or punishing people, and reports about the extent of dereliction which reached the Prefect's desk resulted in the Prefect issuing angry warnings but no dismissals for culprits.

This had ramifications on the home front because nothing came of a failure to conform to war regulations for air defence. There is, however, another point to make: police were comparatively thin on the ground in wartime Italy and many arrests were the result of tip-offs received from informants, usually PNF cardholders, who perceived that serious crimes were being committed. From archival evidence, it seems that the rate of denunciations of infringements concerning air defence was significantly lower than that for other wartime infringements such as black market activities, defeatist remarks, insulting the Duce or listening to foreign radio broadcasts—all crimes which normally resulted in a custodial sentence or a period of internal exile known as *confino*.<sup>51</sup> It seems that, in the early phase of the war, air defence precautions were comparatively exempt from this form of public and party control. This was not due to police ineptitude. The prison register of 1940 dispels any stereotypical notions that the carabinieri were benevolent and simply too easy-going to effectively police the home front. In 1940, a number of Friulian men and women were incarcerated by the police, sometimes for a number of weeks, on no specific charge other than being a perceived threat to public safety (*motivo di Pubblica sicurezza*, MPS). Whenever there are wartime regulations there are inevitably transgressors, but the point is that in Udine the Prefettura, the army and, to an extent,

the PNF were remarkably tolerant of infringements of air raid precautions. This suggests that the local Fascist authorities did not perceive air defence to be particularly important even in urban areas.

#### AIR RAID PRECUATIONS IN RURAL AREAS

During the war, the regime prioritized industrial and port areas which meant that town councils in areas of secondary importance were expected to scale-down plans for public shelters, presumably so that the regime could redirect its resources and concentrate its efforts on protecting the most likely targets.<sup>52</sup> Thus, Italy's air defence precautions were really meant for large urban areas and industrial cities, but paradoxically rural provinces were expected to follow national orders too. Many local government officials in Friuli probably recognised that air defence was much less important in their region. Despite this, at the outbreak of the war the CPPAA established air raid precautions in fourteen *comuni*: Udine, Pordenone, Sacile, Casarsa, Codroipo, Cividale, Palmanova, Cervignano, Latisana, Tolmezzo, Gemona, Pontebba, Tarvisio, and Spilimbergo. There were no air defence precautions in the small towns which were 'rural in character and without any important buildings or organisations'.<sup>53</sup>

National orders were that small communities which did not have the technology to be warned about imminent air raids had to adopt a permanent blackout as part of the province's air raid precautions. This was because the state telephone company, *Telve*, did not employ operators at rural telephone exchanges to connect calls made during the night, and therefore some rural *comuni* could not be warned about an air raid after a certain hour.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned above, Italy entered the war in the summertime, which heavily reduced the impact of the blackout on civilians, but by November 1940 most workers in areas affected by a permanent blackout were travelling to and from work in total darkness. For example, shift workers in Torreviscosa who cycled to work had to undertake a perilous journey along a road which was very busy during the night and at least one fatal accident resulted from blackout precautions near the factory.<sup>55</sup> According to the Podestà of Udine, without street lighting, a few people drowned in canals in the rural districts of Rizzi and

Cussignacco on the outskirts of town<sup>56</sup> and this led to calls from local government officials to lift the blackout, a precaution perceived by many Podestàs as being wholly unnecessary for the rural population. In Gemona, a small town situated in the foothills of the Alps, a total blackout made travel on steep curving mountain gravel or dirt roads with no barriers a perilous journey. The Podestà commented that alpine bends could lead travellers without lights into an abyss.<sup>57</sup>

Also, in rural towns which did adopt air raid precautions, for example, Cividale, air defence consisted of little more than an air raid siren mounted on the cathedral roof. Palmanova had no air raid precautions at all, not even a siren, and Casarsa, which was an important railway hub, had no UNPA section and relied on the local fire brigade to deal with the possibility of air raids. San Giorgio di Nogaro had no fire brigade so it was impossible to train rural UNPA organisers, the *capi-fabbricato*, with the particular skills needed to deal with incendiaries. Rural areas were not, however, entirely inactive; but reports show that local government officials adopted only very limited measures. In most cases, the UNPA sections in smaller towns were created only to protect important buildings, such as the town hall (*palazzo municipale*) and were never implemented to safeguard rural households from incendiary attacks. Thus the true purpose of rural air defence was to protect the infrastructure of local government, as it were, rather than rural inhabitants.

In any case, the evidence seems to lend weight to the UNPA Inspectorate's view that many *comuni* had deliberately ignored circulars from the Prefettura with orders to implement air raid precautions<sup>58</sup> and it undoubtedly undermined Fascist authority in matters of civil defence. Many of the UNPA Inspectorate reports from 1940-41 offered a facile optimism and gave formal assurances that air defence problems were now slowly being resolved, but, reading between the lines, it is clear that they had discovered the province's small towns were ill-prepared for air defence—contrary to Fascist decrees and provincial orders from the Prefettura.

UNPA records show that most municipalities were reluctant to enforce basic war regulations. In Tolmezzo, the real priority was the building of military fortifications along Italy's frontier with Nazi Germany, and the ambivalent nature of these war preparations suggests that the Fascists were more concerned about keeping out the *Wehrmacht*. The German Immigration Office in Tarvisio protested that the

Italian army was requisitioning ethnic Germans' land to build defensive fortifications against the Third Reich.<sup>59</sup> In any event, so many local men were involved in fortifying the frontier region that the Podestà of Tolmezzo, who had done nothing to implement air raid precautions, claimed he would have to employ women or boys from the youth section of the PNF to build public shelters.<sup>60</sup> Here in Tolmezzo we find some confirmation of De Felice's thesis that although Mussolini entered the war as Germany's ally, even after June 1940 he was still undecided about who Italy's real enemy was.<sup>61</sup>

In Casarsa, designated as a major railway hub with five branch lines to Gemona, Udine, Veneto, Portogruaro, and Motta, and with a military airfield about a mile from the station, it made sense to provide public shelter, but even here the municipal authorities had only built three slit trenches by August 1940.<sup>62</sup> One was filled in after it partially collapsed in December 1942, and the remaining two trenches were considered far too dangerous to be used. Thus municipal authorities themselves gave people the impression that air defence was of little or no importance.

Fascist laws of 1936 stated that all new housing in towns of a certain size had to provide the inhabitants with bomb shelters, but the legislation proved to be unpopular for it obviously meant much greater expense and planning. When the air war escalated in late 1941, and air raid precautions became very important, UNPA was supposed to nominate new wardens in the communes to police infringements of Fascist building laws in the *comuni*.<sup>63</sup> However, when UNPA asked the *comuni* to nominate air defence representatives on the committees, the *Commissioni Edilizie Comunali*, local government officials showed no sign of being willing or able to find people who had the proper qualifications, were exempt from the draft, and who wanted to do the job. The Prefect ordered Podestàs to nominate air defence representatives, but local officials, who probably resented increasing state intervention, were somewhat reluctant to appoint UNPA members to housing committees. Both the towns of Pontebba and Casarsa, for example, did not comply with national orders and argued that there were no engineers, architects or army engineers available to implement the wartime regulations. Tolmezzo did not even reply to Prefettura requests while Cervignano suggested nominating a lawyer, who



later declared that he was unwilling to do the job. Clearly, architects and engineers in small towns resented the idea of a representative from UNPA advising council committees about shelter obligations for new buildings.<sup>64</sup> It suggests that there was particular resentment in rural areas towards air raid precautions which were perceived to be unnecessary. Clearly the interests of the communities were paramount and local loyalties meant people were extremely reluctant to take on the job of making sure that the community followed Fascist wartime regulations.<sup>65</sup> The result was that very few air raid shelters were built in rural areas.

Air raid precautions had particular relevance for rural borderlands in the province of Udine after Italy unilaterally and deliberately started a war with its eastern neighbour, Yugoslavia, in April 1941. As the Italian 2nd Army advanced from Trieste into Slovenia and began military operations in the region, it is not surprising that the CPPAA began to take rural air raid precautions much more seriously. The crucial importance of the situation in Yugoslavia, and the new urgency in surveying air raid precautions can be read in a letter the Prefect himself wrote in April 1941.<sup>66</sup> Developments in Yugoslavia also coloured the propaganda in *Il Popolo* which insisted that the conflict was not a war to expand Italy's horizons with foreign conquest, but a Darwinian struggle for national survival.<sup>67</sup>

As a result, rural inhabitants in the province, who had hitherto been little affected by air raid precautions, were prompted by the CPPAA into organising themselves for air defence. UNPA did not have a dominant role in rural air raid precautions because villages did not have the key figure of the *capo-fabbricato*. Parish priests and schoolteachers were therefore seen as being particularly important in educating the public about air defence given their influence within farming communities and their role as transmitters of information, including the potential danger of enemy air raids. Although in theory the Fascist authorities in farming communities formed air defence committees which included the Podestà, Commissario del Fascio, Fiducario degli Agricoltori, Fiducario dei Lavoratori Agricoli, Segretaria del Fascio Femminili and the Fiduciaria delle Massaie rurali, the Comandante del GIL and Centro Premilitare, in practical terms it was the parish priest and primary school teachers who had the dominant role in the organisation of air raid precautions, although in some places peasants themselves arranged meetings



to discuss the dangers of aerial attack. In the village of Zoppola, in the lowlands of Friuli, farmers held meetings about air defence and both the parish priest and the schoolteachers informed villagers about the dangers of enemy raids.<sup>68</sup> In the village of Grimacco, the elders and the heads of peasant households were told about air raid precautions, and it was they who were supposed to make sure that villagers came to fight fires with the proper equipment.<sup>69</sup>

An obvious problem in rural areas was how wartime regulations were to be communicated to remote peasant households in which there was usually no newspaper or radio. One of the ways of reaching rural inhabitants during wartime was to place colourful government posters on buildings where peasants would see them: the offices of the farmers' consortium (*Consorzio agrario*), dairies, taverns and churches. In one village, Rivignano, the CPPAA placed posters about air raid precautions at the entrance to the parish church so that peasants coming to mass could read about the dangers of aerial attack. The parish priest of Rivignano made full use of the congregation to give people information about air defence. For example, on one particular occasion, he explained what an incendiary device was.<sup>70</sup> The priest in Rivignano was almost certainly reading the safety leaflet published by the Udine CPPAA, *La piastrina incendiaria*. This pamphlet was a detailed description of the British incendiary device, a fire-raising weapon dropped on targets to inflict the maximum amount of destruction. This pamphlet pointed out that incendiaries were particularly dangerous for small children who often found them scattered on the ground. It was stated quite explicitly that playing with the devices could make the phosphorous explode. Because incendiaries would not explode if the gauze was damp, the CPPAA advised people to throw water on unexploded devices.<sup>71</sup>

It is important to note that organisers of air defence in rural areas were not necessarily Fascist officials. In fact circulars written by the CPPAA show that the Committee realized priests in particular could play an important role in rural areas, speaking from the pulpit (*parlando dal pergamo*) after mass and during religious festivals.<sup>72</sup> Priests were able to use their position of authority to convey important Fascist regulations. Not only did parish priests warn about the dangers of air attack but they often disseminated a little political propaganda on behalf of the Fascist authorities, warning villagers, for example, to be alert to the possibility of subversive

elements within their own farming communities—probably a reference to the presence of communist cells, real or imagined, in rural areas—who ‘may have been recruited by the enemy to destroy crops’.<sup>73</sup> In this way, priests contributed to the persecution of individuals whose political conduct transgressed Fascist law.

Letters between the Podestàs of farming communities and the Prefect suggest there was much propaganda in the villages, but no evidence of technology or training being used in rural areas as part of village air raid precautions. Peasants were expected to change traditional farming practices; for example, to dig long trenches between crops to limit the destructive power of incendiaries. It should be noted, however, that the activities of the CPPAA in rural areas rarely introduced new air defence technology.

For example, none of the small rural communities had air raid sirens. In Vivaro, as in other villages, the church bells were rung in a very distinctive way, with a hammer tone (*a martello*) or continuously for about a minute (*a storno per un minuto*) so that people would not confuse an air raid warning with religious services. Here, the village schoolteacher dedicated whole lessons to air raid precautions and the parish priest told children about the dangers of air raids during catechism lessons (*l'insegnamento della dottrina*). Organisers of rural air defence tried hard to enhance a strong feeling of local identity; for example, villagers overcame deficiencies in fire engines and fire-fighting equipment by arranging for the whole community to turn out with buckets and shovels in the event of bombers dropping fire-raising incendiaries. Squads of teenagers, who had volunteered to fight fires, were expected to be the first on the scene.<sup>74</sup> An UNPA circular from Rome shows that a stereotypical view of farming communities was that rural people were fully equipped to deal with incendiary attacks because peasants had some experience of fighting fires.<sup>75</sup>

Most rural Podestàs were of course keen to show the Prefettura that their communities were organised for air defence and were obeying national orders; but on the other hand, some saw things differently and expressed grave doubts about the real threat of incendiary attacks. The Podestà of Sauris, for example, pointed out that CPPAA propaganda was almost irrelevant to his remote village since there were no cereals grown in the area and so air raid precautions amounted to little more than

protecting Alpine forest. He wrote 'The forest is immersed in dampness and peaks and north-facing slopes are still covered in snow which fell in May. If, as I hope, summer comes this year, we will turn our attention to the possibility of air raids.'<sup>76</sup> Records show that the CPPAA printed and distributed an immense amount of publicity material in rural areas between June 1940 and May 1941: according to its own records, the CPPAA produced about 1,000 circulars, 7,000 instruction leaflets and some 60,000 posters on air raid precautions for rural communities.<sup>77</sup> Precisely how many people actually read the CPPAA propaganda is impossible to determine, but a considerable effort was made to inculcate rural inhabitants with the notion that air raid precautions were important to them too.

That said, documents also show that CPPAA army officials rarely visited small towns and villages to see for themselves the extent of air raid precautions. UNPA's problem was that its resources, in terms of petrol and vehicles, were already overstretched in urban areas. In September 1941, the increasingly difficult economic situation meant that UNPA units had an allowance of only one litre of petrol a month with which drivers were also expected to run the engines of their lorries weekly in accordance with the rules of vehicle maintenance. Fuel was so short that the War Ministry adamantly refused to authorise a greater allowance for UNPA which was supposed to economise on petrol consumption even during air raids.<sup>78</sup> UNPA made regular but futile requests for more petrol for the local section; for example, in April 1941 UNPA requested another twenty litres of petrol to train a few male members to drive its vehicles.<sup>79</sup> The requests for petrol suggest, at least at local level, that UNPA leaders were unaware that supplies were desperately short or at times entirely lacking. The Ministry of War pointed out to UNPA organisers that Mussolini himself had imposed big restrictions on the use of petrol on the home front, but circulars mentioned nothing about the real extent of shortages which effectively immobilised air defence.<sup>80</sup>

But petrol shortages alone do not tell the full story. UNPA was not a mechanised force because the organisation simply did not have enough vehicles for air defence. Records show that UNPA had only four serviceable lorries for the whole province.<sup>81</sup> Rural areas had no vehicles at all and local aircraft 'spotters' were expected to give advance warning of enemy bombers approaching by cycling to the

nearest village that had a telephone. In April 1941, UNPA had two vehicles in Udine, one in Pordenone and one in Cervignano. One vehicle was hardly adequate for Pordenone, an industrial town with more than 20,000 inhabitants, and the UNPA section in Tarvisio had no transport at all. The *Comando Generale* of UNPA issued national orders in October 1940 urging provincial organisations to find more transport, but there were no funds to requisition vehicles of any sort. This situation led to a bizarre arrangement for the local section in Udine; for a nominal fee a local hotel proprietor, a certain Beltrame, who clearly had access to supplies of petrol, used his private bus during the day but, just before dark, parked it outside the UNPA headquarters where the bus could be used by the rescue squads in the event of a raid. All that was needed was permission from the Prefect for the Hotel Italia bus to circulate after dark and during air raids.<sup>82</sup>

As for the CPPAA in this period, the Committee did not have any vehicles for the inspection of air raid precautions in Friuli, the largest province in Italy, with the result that the Provincial Inspector had to rely on public transport, trains, buses or trams, to view air raid precautions in the towns and villages. The Ministry of War sent UNPA a monthly allowance of 100lire so that the CPPAA could hire a car to visit the many villages without public transport, but, as vehicle rentals cost at least 75lire a day,<sup>83</sup> this meant that the Committee was unable to carry out many inspections.

In fact, records of visits (*giornate di missione*) by the Inspectorate of the CPPAA, Colonel Arnaldo Colla, show that he assessed air raid precautions on average in only two or three *comuni* a month in 1941 and four or five *comuni* a month in 1942, a pathetically small number of inspections in a province which had 172 *comuni*. Arnaldo Colla was normally the only CPPAA member to inspect air raid precautions although, another CPPAA organiser, Captain Antonio Vidoni, seems to have assessed air raid precautions too, though only for about 4-5 days a month. In July 1941, Arnaldo Colla inspected the factory at Torviscosa, and the towns of Tolmezzo, Trevisio, Tarvisio, Cordenons and Pordenone, Cividale and Codriopo. In the important towns, he stayed over night to visit shelters, but in smaller towns visits rarely lasted more than a few hours.<sup>84</sup> Buffarini insisted that Prefects or Fascist officials were to inspect air raid precautions in order to be aware of the extent to

which regulations were being followed and to prove that the authorities were in fact taking an interest in public safety during a critical period for morale.<sup>85</sup> In reality, however, the organisers of air defence rarely visited villages to investigate rural air raid precautions. That UNPA and CPPAA officials could not even take transport for granted suggests that Italy's lack of raw materials such as oil was a crucial factor in determining the scale of Italy's air raid precautions.

In conclusion, the remarkably small scale of Udine's air raid precautions suggests that the regime and the territorial army did not think civil defence was an important priority in 1940-41. It is possible to argue that by placing air raid precautions firmly in the hands of the territorial army rather than the PNF organisation UNPA, the regime did not want the Party to have a major role in civil defence. As I have shown, the PNF was utterly subordinate to the territorial army in matters of civil defence.

The case of Udine demonstrates that the regime was able to mobilise effectively what resources existed in rural areas for civil defence, for example the fire brigades and farm equipment, but the efforts of poverty-stricken villages and market towns to comply with air raid precautions were inevitably feeble. This meant that the province was largely unprepared for the air raids of 1943-1945. MacGregor Knox has argued that incompetence and cultural deficiencies within the military prevented the Fascists from preparing for a modern war, but evidence from Udine suggests that just as important was the fact that the territorial army authorities were not particularly concerned with the threat posed by aerial attack in the early part of the war. That said, as Knox has argued, the Second World War was characterized by mechanised warfare and evidence from Udine suggests that Italian society was bereft of some of the modern technology and machines required to prepare for the kind of war being waged by Germany.

#### Endnotes to Chapter Three

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Capobianco, 'La Guerra a Napoli. Il Vissuto e il rimosso', in *Italia contemporanea*, 164 (1986).



- <sup>2</sup> Miriam Mafai, *Pane nero. Donne e vita quotidiana nella seconda guerra mondiale* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1987), 116-7.
- <sup>3</sup> Lepre, *Le illusioni, la paura, la rabbia. Il fronte interno italiano 1940-1943*, 57.
- <sup>4</sup> 'Le disposizioni prefettizie per la protezione antiaerea', *PdF*, 11 June 1940.
- <sup>5</sup> John Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy* (Adelaide: Canberra Australian War Memorial, 1954), 446-7.
- <sup>6</sup> Horst Boog, 'The Luftwaffe's Assault', in Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (eds), *The Burning Blue. A New History of the Battle of Britain* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 50.
- <sup>7</sup> 'La Milizia artiglieria contraerea', *PdF*, 13 July 1940.
- <sup>8</sup> Il Sottocapo di S.M. per la difesa Territoriale, Bergia, to all prefects, 27 March 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>9</sup> Il Presidente del comitato centrale I.P.A.A., E. Rovere, to all prefects, 8 June 1934, on the new regulations for air defence, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>10</sup> 'L'attrezzatura dell'UNPA', *PdF*, 16 June 1940.
- <sup>11</sup> Lepre, *Le illusioni, la paura, la rabbia. Il fronte interno italiano, 1940-1943*, 57.
- <sup>12</sup> 'L'attrezzatura dell'UNPA', *PdF*, 16 June 1940.
- <sup>13</sup> Two men's jobs were not listed. See a list of members of UNPA's rescue squad (primo intervento) in Cervignano from carabinieri Legione Territoriale dei CC RR. di Padova, Stazione di Cervignano del Friuli, 19 December 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>14</sup> Comandante Generale Giuseppe Stellingwerff, 20 September 1941, on applications to leave UNPA, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>15</sup> Circular from Il Comandante Generale, Giuseppe Stellingwerff, to all prefects, 17 November 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>16</sup> Even the local Fascist leader who wore a uniform, a black shirt (la camicia nera), the official uniform of the PNF from 1932 onwards, was a non-combatant.
- <sup>17</sup> Cesare Miani to Prefect, 26 June 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>18</sup> Circular from Ministry of War, SM Territoriale Ufficio Protezione Antiaerea e Difesa Coste, 16 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>19</sup> All Italians had a 'sheet' (il certificato penale), a copy of which could be requested from the Procurator in Udine detailing the political and moral conduct of the person. Thus, the carabinieri were able to run checks on the backgrounds of all UNPA recruits, men and women, so that those with a criminal record could be disqualified from civil defence duties. See UNPA circular from Il Comandante Generale Giuseppe Stellingwerff, UNPA, 14 October 1940, on background checks of UNPA recruits, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>20</sup> Cesare Miani to the PNF district leaders (Gruppi Rionali I, II, III, IV, V), 11 July 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>21</sup> Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione* (Bari: Laterza, 2000), 190.
- <sup>22</sup> UNPA circular from Il Comandante Generale, Giuseppe Stellingwerff, 17 October 1941 ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>23</sup> PNF Ufficio, Disciplina, Situazione Politica, 19 October 1940, ACS, PNF, Fascio di Combattimento di Udine, b.1642.
- <sup>24</sup> UNPA circular from Giuseppe Stellingwerff, 14 October 1940, on background checks of UNPA recruits, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>25</sup> UNPA Circular from Giuseppe Stellingwerff, 7 August 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>26</sup> Report from the Chief of Air Defence, Luigi Gambelli, to Prefect, 29 March 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>27</sup> One slit-trench was dug in the middle of a local playing field, the Campo Sportivo Ricreatorio Festivo, normally used for football matches. Unsurprisingly, the sports organisers asked for it to be filled in again. Presidente CONI Comitato Provinciale Udine to Prefect, 16 September, 1941. ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.
- <sup>28</sup> The Fascist authorities calculated that shelters would hold 2 persons per square metre and shelters had signs showing the exact number allowed. In practice, however, the number of civilians in shelters always exceeded this conservative estimate. Ministero della Guerra, Stato Maggiore per la Difesa del Territorio Ufficio protezione Antiaerea e Difesa Coste Sezione PG, to all prefects, on air raid shelters, 6 November 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.
- <sup>29</sup> Prefect to the Interior Ministry, 30 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7. The population of Udine was 73,194 according to the 1939 censor returns published in *PdF*, 21 August 1940.

- <sup>30</sup> Giovanni De Luna, 'Torino in guerra: la ricerca di un'esistenza collettiva', in Bruna Micheletti and Pier Paolo Poggio (eds), *L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. Annali della fondazione «Luigi Micheletti»*, 5, 896-7.
- <sup>31</sup> Prefect of Udine to the Ministry of the Interior, undated and unsigned, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.
- <sup>32</sup> Ministry of War (Direzione centrale della PAA) to all prefects, on the subject of air raid shelters, 12 May 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.
- <sup>33</sup> Il Sottocapo di SM per la Difesa Territoriale, Bergia to all prefects on air defence, 27 March 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>34</sup> Prefect to Ministry of War, Ufficio Protezione Antiaerea e Difesa Coste, 3 April 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>35</sup> Capo-fabbricato to Comando Provinciale UNPA, 8 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.15.
- <sup>36</sup> Letter from IV Gruppo Rionale, 14 June 1940, on blackout, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>37</sup> Circular from Questore di Udine to Prefect, 3 September 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.9.
- <sup>38</sup> Although there was an official UNPA uniform of sorts, it seems that most of its members wore civil defence armbands, which sometimes meant they were not immediately recognisable as air defence volunteers and therefore had to show identification passes to get into bombed areas during an air raid. See Circular from Giuseppe Stellingwerff, UNPA, Rome, 20 August 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>39</sup> Report from Cesare Miani to Prefect, 11 July 1940, on the blackout, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.9.
- <sup>40</sup> Circular from Bergia, War Ministry, PAA, 16 December 1940, to all prefects, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12. Some provinces used soldiers to police shelters but the CPPAA Committee in Udine decided not to use soldiers at public shelters at least in the early part of the war. See Prefect to military commanders (Comando Zona Militare), on the deployment of soldiers in Udine for shelter duty, 1 November 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.
- <sup>41</sup> Cesare Miani to Prefect, 22 March 1941 on blackout infringements, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.17.
- <sup>42</sup> Prefect to Comando Provinciale UNPA, 25 March 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.17.
- <sup>43</sup> Questore to Prefect, 7 April 1941, on the blackout, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.17.
- <sup>44</sup> Prefect to Questore, 15 July 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.9.
- <sup>45</sup> Palmiro Leskovic to Spett. Direzione UNPA Udine, 9 July 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.9.
- <sup>46</sup> Prefect to Interior Minister, DGPS, Divisione Polizia Politica, Rome, 22 September 1940, in 'Rapporti del Prefetto di Udine al Ministero degli Interni, Agosto 1940-giugno 1941', published in *Storia contemporanea in Friuli*, 12 (1981), 187.
- <sup>47</sup> See for example 'Perchè si batte la Gran Bretagna', *PdF*, 12 September 1940.
- <sup>48</sup> Prefect to prison governor (Direzione Carceri Giudiziarie), Udine, 29 July 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>49</sup> Prefect to Podestà, 30 July 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>50</sup> Prefect to chief of local fire brigade, 30 July 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>51</sup> As a security measure, many Italians, especially anti-fascists, were sentenced to internal exile by a special drumhead court (il Tribunale special per la difesa dello stato) and usually detained on one of the islands of Ustica, Lipari, Ponza or Ventotene or a remote area of southern Italy. Those who were exiled were normally held in a province that was far from their place of residence and had their movements restricted. Perhaps the most famous *confinato* was the writer Carlo Levi (1902-75) whose account of the conditions of southern peasantry *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli, 1945) was written in Florence. For the actual regulations of confino, see a transcript of the Fascist law R.D. 18 June 1931, n.773 in Alberto Aquarone, *L'Organizzazione dello stato totalitario* (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), 555-560.
- <sup>52</sup> The War Ministry issued a list of Italian cities on 10 June 1940, based on the demographic and industrial importance of the city in relation to the distance from enemy bases and classed cities as high, medium and low-priority (P-Premminente, M-Media, S-Scarsa). Udine was classed as M, of medium priority, together with Modena, Padua, Mantua, Ravenna and Catania where air raid precautions could be carried out at a much slower rate than in the industrial cities and port areas. Thus priority for raw materials was given to cities assigned the letter P, namely Turin, Milan, Venice, Verona, Florence, Trieste, Genoa, Rome, Venice, Bologna, Taranto, Reggio Calabria, Livorno, Ferrara, Palermo and Bolzano. See the urgent and secret circular from Bergia, 10 June 1940, on preparations for air defence, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.

- <sup>53</sup> Prefect to Comando Provinciale dell'UNPA, on the organisation of Capi-fabbricato, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>54</sup> Prefect to the Director of the local telephone company, TELVE, 13 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.11.
- <sup>55</sup> Commissario Prefettizio, Municipio di Muzzana Turignano, to Prefect, 5 November 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.17.
- <sup>56</sup> Podestà of Udine, to Prefect, 19 November 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.17.
- <sup>57</sup> Podestà of Gemona to Prefect, 16 September 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.17.
- <sup>58</sup> Inspection of local defences entitled 'Sopralluoghi ed ispezioni eseguite nel marzo-aprile 1940', ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>59</sup> Letter from *Ufficio Speciale*, Tarvisio, 27 April, 1940. ASU, Gab. Pref., b.26, f.105.
- <sup>60</sup> Commissario Prefettizio, Tolmezzo, to Prefect, 13 and 19 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.20.
- <sup>61</sup> De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. I. L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. I. Dalla guerra «breve» alla guerra lunga*, 88.
- <sup>62</sup> Prefect to Interior Ministry, PAA, 3 August 1940 on air raid shelters in Casarsa, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.20.
- <sup>63</sup> UNPA circular, 5 September 1941, on the nomination of wardens in minor towns, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>64</sup> Cesare Miani, to CPPAA Committee, 26 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>65</sup> Prefect to CPPAA Committee, 6 May 1941, on UNPA representatives for the Commissioni edilizie comunali, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>66</sup> Prefect to Direzione dei Servizi per la Protezione Antiaerea, Rome, 2 May 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.23.
- <sup>67</sup> 'Intensa attività aerea sui vari fronti di guerra', *PdF*, 11 February 1941.
- <sup>68</sup> Podestà Comune di Zoppola, to Prefect, 25 April 1941, on the protection of agriculture, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>69</sup> Commissario Prefettizio, Grimacco, to Prefect, 11 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>70</sup> Podestà, Comune di Rivignano, to Prefect, 26 May 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>71</sup> Leaflet 'Come proteggersi dalla nuova offesa aerea nemica: La piastrina incendiaria', undated and unsigned, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>72</sup> R. Prefettura di Udine, CPPAA, Istruzioni e norme per la protezione antiaerea dell'Agricoltura allegato 1, undated, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>73</sup> Podestà Comune di Rivignano to Prefect, 26 May 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>74</sup> Podestà, Municipio di Vivaro, to Prefect, 15 April 1941, on air raid precautions, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>75</sup> Podestà, Comune di Buttrio, to Prefect undated probably March to May 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>76</sup> Podestà, Municipio di Sauris, to Prefect, 31 May 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.18.
- <sup>77</sup> Prefect to Comando Difesa Territoriale, 13 May 1941, on the CPPAA's activities, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>78</sup> Circular from Il Comandante Generale, UNPA, 23 September, 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>79</sup> Cesare Miani to Prefect, 16 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>80</sup> Ministero della Guerra, Sezione PG, to Prefect, 11 December 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>81</sup> Cesare Miani to Comando Generale dell'UNPA, 5 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>82</sup> Cesare Miani to the Prefect, 8 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>83</sup> Prefect to MI, Protezione Antiaerea, Rome, 25 March 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>84</sup> Memo 'Indennità di Missione percepita dal Colonello Colla, Arnaldo nel mese di Luglio 1941', 14 August 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>85</sup> Buffarini, Ministry of the Interior, Direzione affari generali, 13 September 1942, on public and domestic shelters, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.

CHAPTER FOUR  
AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS 2:  
EVACUATION, FACTORY DEFENCE AND THE ESCALATING AIR WAR  
JUNE 1940 TO MAY 1943

The first part of this chapter looks at evacuation, arguably the most effective air raid precaution of the Second World War. Udine's wartime plans for evacuation within the province did not start from scratch. During the late 1930s, the Prefettura prepared detailed evacuation orders to be carried out in the event of a major war in Europe. In theory, Udine, a predominantly rural province, was supposed to be ready to absorb urban Italians from industrial and port areas, but the reality of wartime was very different.

The second part of this chapter explores factory defence. Important factories were expected to adopt air raid precautions to protect workers and to minimise the disruptive effects of air raids on industrial production, and although the province was rural, the process of industrialization which started here in the late nineteenth century meant Udine had some key sectors of industry, including mechanical engineering, ceramics and textiles, which were important to the national war effort.

The last section of this chapter explores civil air raid precautions in 1942-1943 and focuses on how Italians organised themselves for civil defence in a period in which it became clear that the war was set to continue, and to intensify. In the case of Milan, Luigi Ganapini has suggested that, in this crucial period, the regime's failure to implement air raid precautions did much to undermine the credibility of Fascism and contributed greatly to the disintegration of the home front.<sup>1</sup> The home front in Udine, however, was of a very different nature from that in the large urban agglomerations like Naples, Milan, Turin and Genoa.

EVACUATION

In Fascist Italy, as in other belligerent nations, it was feared that the start of the war would bring mass bombing attacks that would flatten Rome, Milan, Turin and other important cities. It was therefore natural that a predominantly rural province like Udine should become a reception area for evacuees from the industrial



and major port areas of northern Italy during the war. Aware of the possibility of aerial bombardment, in the summer of 1940 some three thousand urban Italians, including many children, arrived in Friuli hoping to find a temporary home for themselves. This section deals with them.

Although the regime had planned to protect non-combatants in time of war with organisations like UNPA and the *Milizia controaerea*, mass evacuation was problematic because it conveyed the notion that Italy was vulnerable to aerial bombardment—something which Fascist propaganda flatly denied—and hence the press never openly encouraged or discussed flight from the densely populated cities. This explains why it was not until Autumn 1942, when ever-greater weights of bombs were being dropped on industrial areas and ports, that Mussolini consented to municipal authorities evacuating children from Milan, Turin and other cities. In April 1940, Mussolini had issued directives preventing local officials from organising a forced displacement of women and children from urban areas, and had advised prefects to organise overnight evacuations to the outskirts of cities (*sfollamento notturno*)<sup>2</sup> to avoid large population movements between provinces.<sup>3</sup> Italy thus entered the war with no national orders to evacuate children from port and industrial areas. However, the absence of a national plan of any kind did not prevent ordinary Italians from organising evacuation themselves.

In numerical terms, the number of people who evacuated to Friuli in the summer of 1940 was tiny, and the vast majority of evacuees who arrived in the province were women and children from Turin or Milan. Wartime mobilisation orders prevented males between fifteen and sixty-five from leaving their homes<sup>4</sup> because the regime believed that evacuation could do a great deal of harm to the draft. By contrast, the regime published wartime regulations which stated that women who looked after small children would not be mobilised for the war.<sup>5</sup> Mobilisation orders restricting the movement of men meant that evacuation always and inevitably involved splitting up families which made it a more difficult decision for women. Perhaps this explains why relatively few families from Udine who were living in Tobruk, Tripoli and Bengasi actually decided to return home in the first months of the war, despite the possibility of military operations against the Italian colonies.<sup>6</sup>



Evacuation to and within the province of Udine was further restricted in June 1940 when the regime introduced a prohibited area east of the demarcation line Zumula-Tolmezzo to Carso del Tagliamento near the border with Yugoslavia.<sup>7</sup> This decision, clearly taken in the light of Mussolini's plans to bring Yugoslavia into the war, meant that the Prefettura in Udine, which had promised to accept about 19,000 evacuees from other provinces said that it could now take less than 6,000.<sup>8</sup> There is evidence that the military decision to invade Yugoslavia prevented some women and children from evacuating to Friuli. For example, in July 1940 fifty-three people in Turin who had wanted to evacuate to villages near the Yugoslav frontier were prevented from travelling to the borderlands by the wartime restrictions.<sup>9</sup> In addition, evacuees were not allowed to settle in the large towns of Udine and Pordenone or any of the *comuni* north of the Gemona-Claut line, near the border with Nazi Germany.<sup>10</sup> It is also worth noting that the Italian army had occupied Italy's borderlands after the outbreak of war with the result that there was much less accommodation for evacuees in frontier provinces like Udine.<sup>11</sup>

Another factor that prevented many Italians from leaving urban areas was the regime's decision not to provide transport for evacuees as had been previously planned. Because evacuees had to pay their own travel expenses, impoverished Italians, who could ill-afford the cost of a long train journey, were effectively immobilised by the new orders. That the Fascist authorities refused to sponsor wartime evacuation, suggests the regime wanted to prevent large numbers of the urban working class from evacuating the big cities like Milan, Turin, Rome and Naples. Mussolini no doubt supposed that such an exodus would damage his prestige and perhaps even destabilise the regime.

Even with relatively small numbers of evacuees, documents show that initially at least confusion reigned in many of the rural authorities when evacuees started arriving in local reception areas. Disorganised aspects of evacuation can be explained by the fact that at various times the Interior Ministry, the War Ministry, the Italian army and the Fascist Party all had an important role in evacuation.<sup>12</sup> For example, applications for voluntary evacuation were supposed to be authorised by the Interior Ministry, but some women who had decided to evacuate, claimed that their local PNF section had given them perfunctory instructions to travel to Udine,

without any sort of documentation for the Prefettura in the reception area.<sup>13</sup> The case of Udine demonstrates that evacuation between provinces was *ad hoc* and that rural communities were completely unprepared to become reception areas despite the Prefettura's plans during the period of Fascism's colonial wars.

It is worthwhile looking at Udine's pre-war proposals for evacuation which were supposed to protect urban dwellers from an air raid. In 1936, as part of the regime's preparations for a future European war, local authorities were ordered to draw up extensive plans to evacuate the population of the capital Udine and relocate them in rural areas. In theory, people were to be marshalled using letters, numbers or perhaps colours, and transported in groups to avoid a sort of biblical exodus. Mussolini had decided that even hospitals and institutions were to be relocated in rural areas in the event of a major European war. However, translating the Duce's strategic plans to evacuate people into practical orders was no easy task for the Prefettura. For example, the national orders to evacuate the city meant that some 260 children who had been taken into care by the Fascist maternal and infant welfare agency, the *Istituto Provinciale per la Maternità e Infanzia*, would have to leave Udine in the event of war. The Fascist authorities decided at least theoretically to hand the children back to their mothers, if possible, who would receive state benefits to care for them. Other urban children in care, whose families could not be traced, were to be placed temporarily in cheap hotels in Tarcento.<sup>14</sup> However, many of the directors of important Fascist welfare institutions doubted that the evacuation plans would work. For example, the director of the *Istituto Provinciale per la Maternità e Infanzia*, who had personally witnessed children die during the panic and evacuation following the Austro-Hungarian offensive of October 1917, was less than happy about the regime's plans. He believed that some infants in his care would probably not survive evacuation on a similar scale to that which occurred during the First World War.<sup>15</sup>

Also problematic was the transport of hospital patients. For example, according to plans, the geriatric hospital (*Casa di Invalidità e Vecchiaia*) was supposed to evacuate about 250 patients, most of whom were bedridden, to urban granaries despite the fact that such buildings had no heating in winter. The plans did not include transportation and so the director hoped that the territorial army would be

able to provide lorries. In any case, such problems were real impediments to large-scale evacuation and would inevitably mean a remarkably slow and cumbersome operation. The regime liked to appear to be welfare-orientated, but the directors of Fascist welfare institutes saw evacuation plans as a contradiction in terms in that those in care would almost certainly suffer if they were dramatically relocated to the countryside where rural authorities could not possibly offer people the same quality of welfare assistance that patients had hitherto enjoyed in urban areas. Here in Udine, the quality and extent of plans for evacuation left a lot to be desired. Udine demonstrates that local officials often did not have the technical means to implement evacuation proposals.

One factor above all helps to explain why the Fascist authorities were unable to organise evacuation in Udine. The Prefettura's pre-war evacuation plans to move people into rural areas were resisted by rural Podestàs, who were themselves reluctant to accept large numbers of urban dwellers in villages where there was little, if any, surplus accommodation for the families of local inhabitants. Evacuation plans were laid down by officials in the Prefettura, but correspondence shows that the Prefect himself had little knowledge of living conditions in peasant households and that Podestàs had to explain to him simple truths about rural life. For example, in a letter about the social reality of Friuli, the Podestà of San Giorgio di Nogaro revealed that in this town, which still retained its rural character, it was not uncommon to find 'a group of peasants, including couples, their children and other relatives, sleeping together in one large room.' The Podestà was clearly suggesting that cramped housing, squalid living conditions, and Dickensian sleeping arrangements meant that village communities could hardly be expected to welcome outsiders, especially urban evacuees from a different social class, who pictured rural villages as being sheltered and happy.

A report written in May 1939 suggests that, by this time, the Prefect was also trying to convince the Fascist authorities in Rome that life on the land was quite unsuitable for urban Italians probably because of the pressure from Podestàs. In an effort to discourage evacuation to the Friulian countryside, the Prefect wrote to the Interior Ministry claiming that rural communities had a very different set of moral values and were, in his words, 'more promiscuous than their urban counterparts.'<sup>16</sup>

Comments like this reflect not only the Prefect's apparent concern about sending large numbers of urban families into the countryside during the war, but also the result of stubborn resistance from rural communities which were unwilling to collaborate with the Prefettura in implementing national orders.

Despite all the restrictions on evacuation in 1940, many women from industrial and port areas of northern Italy, who were aware of the danger of remaining in the densely populated industrial cities, arrived in Friuli's peasant villages. Some women had brought no clothes or funds with them and were shepherding small children and carrying babies. In the reception areas, the role of the local Fascist Party was primarily to assist evacuees as best they could. At the village of Tarcento, a family of ten were accommodated in a spare room in the village school and allocated army mattresses and beds. In the same village, a heavily pregnant woman from a slum district of Turin, who was soon to give birth to her sixth child, was provided with items and clothing for the new baby by the local PNF section leader (*Segretario del fascio*) of Tarcento.<sup>17</sup> Records suggest that the women and children from urban slums were probably living from hand to mouth, with little or no possibility of making any sort of living on the land. In the village of Attimis, a Milanese widow and daughter had to beg the local authorities for welfare assistance because they had not received a cheque that month from the widow's in-laws.<sup>18</sup>

According to many municipal reports from Friuli, in practice, the great majority of evacuees from Turin and Milan were in fact Friulian women who had found employment in industrial areas before the war. Some fragmentary evidence suggests that many of the women did not think of themselves as real evacuees, but rather as temporary migrants who had decided to return to the villages of their upbringing as a result of the war. In the village of Varmo, for example, out of a total of sixty-three evacuees, there were only three women who had no relatives in the village and were truly outsiders. Some evacuees were tobacco-factory workers or workers from other non-essential industries in Milan and Turin who had simply decided that the city was no longer an attractive place to live in wartime.<sup>19</sup>

Not all the so-called evacuees had left the industrial areas as a measure of self-preservation. In fact, many of the women had been compelled by circumstances to return to their villages. Some domestic servants, who had found employment in



affluent Milanese households before the war, were no longer required when their employers moved into the countryside as a wartime precaution, leaving the women with little choice but to return home to Friuli. In the village of Faedis, for example, five domestic servants, who had recently arrived from Milan, were hoping to leave Friuli as soon as the affluent families which had employed them returned to the city.<sup>20</sup> There is also evidence that most evacuees did not expect to stay in Friuli for a long period of time and were impatient to return to the city, doubtless recognising that the scale of enemy air raids was much smaller than they had expected. For example, after residing in the village of Zoppola for less than a month, a group of women and children from Rome began to ask the Podestà if it was safe enough to return to the capital.<sup>21</sup> In the industrial town of Pordenone nearly all of the 138 evacuees were expected to leave, especially those from northern provinces whom the local *commissario prefettizio* had advised to go home.<sup>22</sup> Many of the problems encountered by evacuees in the case of Udine reflect the squalor and poverty of rural life in Fascist Italy which made even impressive evacuation plans unworkable in practice.

Prefettura census figures show that in June 1940, 3,227 people voluntarily evacuated to Friuli (1,164 from Turin, 928 Milan, 230 Genoa, 262 Trieste, 154 Venice, and 125 from Imperia).<sup>23</sup> Less than one month later, *Il Popolo* announced on 7 July that the local section of the *Fascio femminile* was arranging for the evacuees to return to their cities; only 32 of the 385 evacuees who had arrived at the station in Udine in June were still waiting to leave the province.<sup>24</sup> Articles like this in *Il Popolo* suggest that one of the purposes of publicising an apparent drift back to the cities was propaganda, though precisely how many people returned home of their own free will is not easy to determine. There is evidence to suggest that some impoverished urban families might have been coerced into leaving rural areas; a circular of 21 June 1940 from the Prefect to the Questore stated that evacuees who refused to return to their homes would certainly be denied any form of state welfare in the future.<sup>25</sup>

In any case, by October 1940, evacuation from Milan, Turin, among other cities had declined in importance to such an extent that the Ministry of War was no longer interested in receiving lists of new evacuees in the province of Udine.<sup>26</sup> A month later, according to the Prefect, there were no evacuees in Udine from other



regions of Italy or its African Empire, other than three families from Libya and one from Rhodes.<sup>27</sup> At this point in the war, one can see why officials in Udine did not recognise any need to evacuate people to the countryside when the regime itself was not committed to evacuation from the big cities.

It is difficult to discover more about the experience of women and children who came to Friuli as evacuees during the first summer of war because the press and radio could only publish official announcements from the Prefettura or the Ministry of War regarding the situation. Even the Fascist Party, which organised evacuation and had an important role in reception areas, was not supposed to make any public statements about evacuees.<sup>28</sup>

#### FACTORY DEFENCE

In theory, Udine's factories should have been well-prepared for war because, at least a year prior to June 1940, the Prefettura had been urging the bosses of factories to take precautionary steps against aerial bombardment. In a typical letter to the directors of a local factory, the Prefect outlined the regulations and insisted that factory defence was vital to war production in the province.<sup>29</sup>

Correspondence between managers and the CPPAA, however, reveals that the vast majority of factories did not meet Fascist requirements for war and were totally unprepared for air raids even though the Prefect had sent numerous copies of ministerial circulars on the importance of air defence in industry. In 1939, important firms were supposed to submit detailed plans showing that they had significantly adapted their works to the demands of an industry at war. The Fascist authorities insisted that shelters for the workforce were required and gasmasks had to be issued to at least a third of the employees. Many factories, however, complied only very slowly and tardily with wartime regulations and implemented limited air raid precautions, probably designed to comply with the minimum requirements of Fascist law rather than to protect the workforce and machinery.

In particular, Udine's factory bosses were sceptical about the possibility of air raids and thus extremely reluctant to provide air raid precautions for their workers. At the start of the war, many factories already had works' sirens which had hitherto been used to announce the end of a shift, and were to be used in wartime only to

warn the workforce of an imminent air raid. Letters from factory bosses to the Prefect in the first weeks of the war, however, show that firms which had never used the works' sirens were reluctant to purchase the devices simply for air defence; rather, many bosses decided to rely on public air raid sirens to alert the workforce.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, the Prefect noted that where factories were found, on paper at least, to have apparently implemented blackout and fire-fighting precautions, they had usually not provided workers with any sort of protection; in cases where factory bosses had built air raid shelters, inspectors invariably found that they were not bomb-proof in any accepted sense.<sup>31</sup> During the war, factories which were threatened with closure because of shortages, were even less willing to provide bomb shelters for workers while there was uncertainty over the future of production. Paradoxically, bosses tended to explain the lack of air raid precautions as being due to inevitable factory cutbacks in wartime. For example, the military clothing firm *Giuseppe Bini*, which had not received any supplies of coal for over a month, decided not to provide bomb shelters because there was a possibility that the factory's 250 workers might have to be sent home during the war.<sup>32</sup> Another factory near Maniago, which produced cutlery, had decided to adopt the same defence plan as the local school; the workforce was supposed to run into the nearby hills in the event of an air raid.<sup>33</sup> The tone of these letters suggests that Friulian factory bosses did not think that their factories would be bombed.

By October 1940, most factories had done little more than cover lights with blue paper (*azzurramento*) or apply blue paint to windows.<sup>34</sup> One report on the factories in the province of Udine suggested that most plants had not followed the Fascist regulations on providing shelter for industrial workers. At the cotton mill, *Cotonificio Udinese*, two miles from the town centre, workers were expected to disperse into the countryside in the event of an air raid. One textile factory, *Filatura Makò*, expected its 930 workers to hide in the basement or take shelter under the trees surrounding the factory. Another factory had a shelter for the management, but not the workers, who were supposed to go to the cellars of nearby houses. As regards who was in charge of factory defence, the job of factory warden was usually given to workers on the lowest rung, for example the security guards, who worked on nightshift.

Another detailed report on factories in Friuli, written by the UNPA Chief of National Air Defence, Luigi Gambelli, noted two important points. Firstly, air raid precautions in factories were not sponsored by the state and therefore industrialists were unwilling to pay for air raid shelters out of company funds. A second, related problem was that factory owners preferred to adopt air raid precautions, for example fire extinguishers and communication between employers and workers, which improved health and safety conditions rather than spend money on camouflage and shelter building which were precautions of no benefit to peacetime industry.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the report noted that factories that already used sirens and steam whistles to announce the end of shifts employed the devices exclusively for air raid warnings, whereas, factories without sirens were reluctant to install them and preferred to rely on the public devices nearest to the factory.<sup>36</sup> True, many of the factories in Friuli were not war-related industries, but evidence shows that factories in war-related industries did not prioritise air defence either. Ironically, the province's armaments factories actually conformed to the regime's blackout regulations only because the plants normally shut down for the night once the late shift had gone home.<sup>37</sup>

The case of the Torviscosa factory is emblematic in this respect. The factory, one of the best-known plants in the province, had been inaugurated by Mussolini in 1939 and was supposed to play an important part in the campaign for autarky in the textile industry: the plant was designed to replace significant quantities of wool and cotton with fibres processed from wood pulp.<sup>38</sup> In the CPPAA archive, there is a rare glimpse of a visit in March 1940 to the Torviscosa plant by a national inspector of air defence who was supposed to give technical assistance. There were more than 820 workers in the factory on any one shift, but its air raid precautions consisted of one slit trench near the factory which could hold some 100 workers. The Inspectorate of air defence wrote in his report that 'even though this important factory was built in 1939 with war in Europe imminent, the drawings did not include [building] air raid precautions for workers or machinery.' The Inspector added that the building was made of red brick and 'seems to have been constructed so as to make it as conspicuous as possible from the air.' This same report noted that not only had its planners made it vulnerable and difficult to protect, but that there were 'no bomb shelters for the vast majority of the workforce of over 500 men and women. Nothing

has been done to blackout the light coming from the factories many windows and there is no fire protection for the stockpiles of paper in the factory yard.' When the Inspector arrived, the holder of the directorship was absent from the factory and the air defence inspector was met by two engineers who showed 'no interest in the danger of air raids'. The air defence inspector left the factory without having achieved much and later concluded that 'unless regulations about factory defence are enforced, there might be serious consequences for this factory in the event of war.'<sup>39</sup> By February 1941, the threat of air raids against the factory had become so serious that the workers' families who lived in the purpose-built houses around the plant were either accommodated in the factory building itself or evacuated from the site.<sup>40</sup>

In conclusion, the managers of large firms failed to adopt air raid precautions. The management did not feel responsible for protecting the workforce. The relationship between Fascism and class is complex and much debated, but it is worth pointing out that the regime made little effort in practical terms to protect its workers.

#### PROPAGANDA

Propaganda in *Il Popolo* tried hard to convince people that sufficient air raid precautions were already in place to protect the province. One good example of this is an article which claimed that in the mountains of Friuli there were hundreds of militia soldiers (*legionari della Controaerei*) armed with artillery, fire control equipment and automatic weapons, who were ready to repulse any enemy aerial bombardment. The anti-aircraft battalions of the militia did not have radar, but pictures appeared in the press showing them using horn sound detectors which the writer suggested were sufficient to warn of approaching aircraft. This article, like others published in *Il Popolo*, stated quite clearly that people in Udine could sleep soundly because the town was protected by the *Milizia controaerea*.<sup>41</sup> It is therefore important to note that this propaganda, based on empty rhetoric, nevertheless rendered difficult the public perception of risk because people in Udine had no means of knowing the truth about provincial anti-aircraft defences.

On the other hand, during 1940-42, Royal Air Force bomber crews were not properly trained or equipped to carry out precision attacks against single, distant



targets inland at night. Routes to the target, take off times, and altitudes were decided by individual aircraft captains. Bombing was usually wildly inaccurate not least because of hazardous weather, low cloud or ground haze, the latter very common over industrial areas. Even when bomber crews reported that they had successfully located and hit the target, later reconnaissance photos often showed that nothing of military value had been damaged. It is therefore unsurprising that there were no aerial bombardments and few alarms in a rural province given the nature of current technology.

This is one reason why, in the case of Udine, according to CPPAA officials, the authorities had great difficulty in convincing most people that the war situation had changed. The local UNPA leader, Cesare Miani, who carried out a series of inspections of domestic shelters, probably as a result of aerial bombardments of other large towns, said that most people were convinced that there would be no air raids in the province. In fact, most people who had built a domestic shelter in June 1940, were now using the space as a store cupboard because they believed it had no other useful purpose.<sup>42</sup> After receiving national orders from Rome about the renewed importance of air raid precautions, the Prefect decided to begin another publicity campaign in *Il Popolo* about the danger of air raids. The articles in the broadsheet tried to convince people that there was a risk of enemy attack even though there had been no significant raids against Udine in almost three years of war. The information was particularly aimed at the town's landlords, the vast majority of whom had done nothing for the families who rented their apartments.<sup>43</sup> The advice from the Prefettura must have seemed like a contradiction in terms to the people of Udine because a series of articles in *Il Popolo* assured readers that the war was being won and that Italy had the technical means to defend its cities.

For example, the propaganda tried hard to convince people that even if Italy could not prevent every air raid, Fascism could nevertheless retaliate and defend its own territory. *Il Popolo* claimed that Mussolini, who apparently had visited a torpedo-bombing squadron in a theatre of war, had inspected a powerful, new aircraft—probably the Savoia Marchetti Sparviero—which had only recently gone into service with the Italian air force. Mussolini, said the journalist, had instructed the Italian armaments industry producing the aeroplane to achieve the maximum



output of aircraft as 'humanly possible'.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the regime wanted people to place their faith in Fascism's new technical remedies to defend cities from aerial bombardment. To sum up, Udine's war experience in 1940-42 was limited to a series of false alarms which nevertheless suggested what needed to be done to improve air raid precautions. Factory bosses failed to translate into practice the ministerial circulars urging plants to protect workers and machines. The wailing of sirens had become a matter of routine for the province's inhabitants and attitudes had obviously changed as a result. Reports show that few people were particularly concerned with the possibility of aerial bombardment and this was in no small measure due to the fact that the province did not experience any significant raids in 1940-42. Many failed to see that the lack of proper shelter would have perilous consequences later in the war.

The Prefettura had evidence from statistics gathered by the Fascist authorities after the first big aerial bombardments of the war that air raid shelters were important. According to a memo from the Interior Ministry from November 1941, which was certainly seen by the Prefect, no Italians had been killed in bomb shelters. By contrast, deaths had occurred in circumstances where people had decided to simply stay indoors.<sup>45</sup> In addition, one of the most simple and effective weapons against RAF incendiaries was a bucket of sand and UNPA encouraged the local government to distribute sand to households in town.<sup>46</sup> Therefore the Podestà decided to issue free sand to people in Udine which was delivered by the Roads Department of the local council, so that ordinary people could extinguish incendiaries in their own homes.<sup>47</sup>

The historian Giovanni De Luna, among others, has noted that the damage and victims even in Turin was relatively light until Autumn 1942 when the air war dramatically escalated and Turin experienced the darkest period of the war and the worst air raids to date on an Italian city. De Luna has suggested that the war situation was very different after the devastating attacks on Italy's most industrial city.<sup>48</sup> Luigi Ganapini has argued that terror was the principle aim of Allied air raids during this period where there is evidence of 'area bombing' against the morale of the Italian people.<sup>49</sup> However, the next section examines initial reports of air raid alarms in 1943 which suggest that both local government officials and ordinary people in

Udine were not galvanised by the escalation of the air war against the big cities into adopting air raid precautions because they still believed there was little possibility of aerial bombardment in the province.

#### THE AIR WAR ESCALATES

On March 17 1943, Udine experienced its first air raid alert since December 1940. The attack occurred during a period of Allied raids against cities in northern Italy, in particular Milan and Turin. The antiaircraft batteries warned the provincial capital that bombers were flying towards the province. At this point in the war, there was still no special telephone or telegraph circuit to give rural communities ample warning of enemy bombers and so the air raid alert was passed on to the smaller *comuni* by *Telve*, the local telephone company, which informed the government authorities and the air defence organisation, UNPA. On this occasion, rumours spread that the telephone company had knowledge of the raid, and its lines soon became overloaded with people trying to find out important details. In one recorded case, this prevented the phone company from alerting an electrical substation in Udine about the imminent raid.<sup>50</sup>

Initial reports from the March raid suggest that there were circumstances in which people carried on with what they were doing even after the siren had sounded. There is also evidence to suggest that when people were enjoying themselves they ignored the air raid alert. For example, as the enemy bombers flew over the province, most people who were dining in the trattorias and restaurants remained at their tables until they had finished their meals. It is also worth noting that a few Fascist bureaucrats who had gone to take cover in shelters forgot to switch off the lights in their offices, wartime infringements that were later reported by *capi-fabbricato*. Voluntary firemen, who were supposed to be guarding important buildings failed to report for duty<sup>51</sup> and one *capo-fabbricato*, Luigi Mattiussi, was arrested during the air raid alert and later court-martialled for drinking at a bar whilst he was supposed to be on duty.<sup>52</sup> The raid was an opportunity for the local Fascist leader, Mario Gino, to see for himself the efficiency of the town's air defence precautions. Mario Gino claimed that the warning system was inaudible on the evening of 17 March; for

example, residents in the district of Sant'Osvaldo, near the railway station, had received no alert, including patients at the psychiatric hospital and workers at an important factory. Ironically, this was the same psychiatric hospital with about 850 patients which the Fascist authorities had wanted to evacuate in 1938 because they were sure the building would be mistaken for a military barracks.<sup>53</sup>

According to Mario Gino, in via Francesco Crispi, some soldiers from the military bakery crowded into the public shelter which had been built for civilians,<sup>54</sup> and none of the railway passengers who arrived on the 23.22 train from Trieste, which pulled into the station during the alarm, were warned about the alert. Instead of entering the railway shelter, the passengers walked out of the station and through the deserted streets completely unaware that the vast majority of people were expecting an air raid.<sup>55</sup> This report from the Udine PNF is but one example of the Fascist leader denouncing the authorities for apparent failure to carry out the regime's wartime regulations. However, in this case, the railway authorities themselves denied that railway workers had not been alerted about the air raid. In fact, according to the head of railway services in Trieste, the passengers had been told to go to the railway shelter—one of the best air raid shelters in town—but not all of them responded in the same way to the warnings: some decided to make their own way home. In future, wrote the railway director, the station gates would be chained shut to prevent further incidents of passengers leaving the station during a raid.<sup>56</sup> In cases like this, the PNF had a remarkably negative role in air defence by reporting individuals in authority for some perceived failure.

In rural areas there was also confusion during the raid of 17 March 1943. In the town of Gemona, the bells in the medieval castle were rung and the cotton mill and paper mill sounded their works sirens, but the Podestà noted that the civilians preferred not to go to the public shelters.<sup>57</sup> Also, one important railway town, Latisana, was never put on alert. The official words 'protezione alarme' were never used to warn the soldiers who were at the siren post; rather, a voice said 'be vigilant, Udine has been alerted!' Expecting to hear more details, the soldiers waited but received no more news until 23.45 when another guard on duty at the public siren received a phone call giving Latisana the 'all clear'. It was only then that soldiers realised that there had been an air raid warning and no one in the town had known

about it.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in the town of Codroipo the telephone caller did not use the proper official code 'protezione alarme' so nothing was done about the air raid alert that night.<sup>59</sup> At Pontebba, technical problems with the line meant that the soldier on duty, Gabriele Azzola, heard the phone ring but when he answered it saying 'pronto' several times there was no reply. One hour later to his surprise he received the all clear signal — 'cessato alarme'.<sup>60</sup> The telephone line between Tarvisio and Tolmezzo was also malfunctioning at the time of the alarm and therefore it was impossible to warn people in Tolmezzo.<sup>61</sup> There were also technical problems with the air raid sirens themselves. In theory, the people living in districts furthest from the town centre were warned by a mobile siren mounted on a motorcycle which rode around the streets, but in practice, many people never heard the mobile siren because it was travelling too quickly.

Another air raid alarm on 24 May revealed particular problems with air raid precautions in the provincial capital. Again, the local section of the PNF clearly used a network of agents and informers to criticise the organisers of air raid precautions. The CPPAA received a series of reports from UNPA volunteers, PNF members of the *Delegati rionali* and *capi-fabbricato* who had observed that the air raid warning sirens were hardly audible in the centre of town still less on the outskirts. It is interesting to note that people were not all rushing to go to public shelters. According to CPPAA reports, most inhabitants of Udine had gone into the countryside and only a tiny number of people had used the public shelters. Many people had tried to use the slit trenches in town, but because the trenches had earth flooring rather than cement paving, they were full of rainwater and mud.

In one public shelter, Rifugio Asquini in Via Manin, there were no oil lamps and the candles had been stolen. Only a small amount of drinking water was provided in unhygienic buckets. At another shelter, rifugio Ferri in via Larga, the doctor found that he had no syringes or any supplies of camphor and caffeine injections, stimulants that were supposed to be in the shelter's medical cabinet. People were assigned to a particular shelter, though not always the nearest one to their home. For example, a certain E. Faioni, who actually lived in an apartment on top of the public air raid shelter in via Rauscedo, had been assigned to the shelter in via Percoto, some distance from his home. The most important fact that emerged



from the air raid on 24 May was that there was no real discipline during the alarm. Many people were casually riding around on bicycles and it was rare to find cyclists who had actually bothered to mask their lights.<sup>62</sup> After this particular raid, the council authorities decided to put clay floors in all the slit trenches so that they could be used in wet weather.<sup>63</sup>

According to the Prefect, the frequent air raids in the province kept the town in a state of constant alarm and many civilians, writing to friends or relatives about the situation in Udine, claimed that the public shelters were inadequate and offered no guarantee of safety.<sup>64</sup> The consequences of having had no raids for a long period of time, are exemplified by the situation in Codroipo, a town in the lowlands of Friuli where there had been no alarms in the first three years of war. On the night of 24 May 1943, the town was surprised by an air raid warning. Most of the town's inhabitants did not rise from their beds as there was a curfew in place, but some villagers went into the countryside and a few stayed in their cellars, though none ventured into the municipal bomb shelters, basic slit trenches, which had been specifically dug for air raid protection. There were no electric batteries for the wardens' torches, so UNPA members could not see into the shadows, and although the firemen rallied from their beds, they did not have sufficient equipment. The local Fascist leader, *il commissario del Fascio*, had no permit to be out after the curfew. One problem was that the *capi-fabbricato* really did not know their duties. In short, there was much to be done in terms of air defence, wrote the Podestà.<sup>65</sup> In another report, the Prefect blamed the incompetence on the municipal police (*vigili urbani*) and wrote that the fault lay not with the state but with the local Podestà, who would have to do more to improve air defence.<sup>66</sup>

The problem was that in the spring 1943, Udine was still a province which had not experienced heavy raids. In fact, in March, hundreds of children from the bombed districts of Milan came to Udine as war evacuees and Fascist propaganda tried hard to make their arrival appear to suggest that there was still much solidarity on the home front. Mothers, fathers and relatives in Milan had seen the children onto trains bound for Friuli where the youngsters were to be looked after by the youth section of the Fascist Party, *GIL*, in a province which the Milanese believed to be relatively safe. The fact that people in Milan were sending their children to the



province of Udine may also have convinced some that the region would avoid the sort of bombardments experienced in Milan, but nevertheless it was clear that the air war against major Italian cities was escalating.<sup>67</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that the province was largely unprepared for evacuation even on a small scale. Although there was a housing problem, the case of Udine demonstrates that rural communities were reluctant to be host to evacuees and absorb urban Italians for the period of the war. Local government officials showed little generosity or openness. Many of the problems encountered by evacuees in the case of Udine reflect the squalor and poverty of rural life in Fascist Italy which made even impressive evacuation plans unworkable in practice. Also, the nature of Fascism meant that the authorities were very concerned about internal migration and in fact there was no large-scale evacuation in Italy during this period.

It must be said that the war on the home front from 1940-1943 in the province of Udine was not that different from the kind of war Fascist Italy had expected to fight. Even when the deficiencies of air raid precautions were exposed by false alarms or perhaps by lone aircraft flying over the province at night, the authorities did little or nothing to remedy the problems. Most people showed an unwillingness to commit resources and energy to air defence because there no longer appeared any reason for protection.

The air war waged in late 1943 was very different, however; for example, new scientific aids became available to bomber Command including ground-marking and target-indicator bombs, which ejected brightly coloured pyrotechnics just above the ground and marked the aiming point. In practical terms, Bomber Command could now hit targets as small as individual synthetic oil plants or railway sheds, which significantly increased the military value of the air war. Udine was probably never on the target list of Bomber Command before the German occupation of the town in September 1943—which explains why Udine did not experience one daylight raid throughout the Fascist period of the war—but, given that the Allies were facing fewer technical problems in 1944, the Royal Air Force was able to carry out more accurate attacks on industrial sectors and civilian morale. From this point onwards, the frequency and severity of air raids in the province rapidly increased.

## Endnotes to Chapter Four

- <sup>1</sup> Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra: Milano 1939-1941*, 17.
- <sup>2</sup> Telegram from Buffarini to all prefects, 14 May 1940, on Mussolini's national orders, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>3</sup> Luigi Gambelli, Direttore Centrale della PAA, to all prefects, 30 April 1940, on voluntary evacuation, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>4</sup> Circular from Comando del Corpo Maggiore, Ufficio Protezione Antiaerea e Difesa Coste, Sezione PA, to all prefects, 2 June 1940, on the evacuation of civilians from large urban areas, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>5</sup> See 'La disciplina dei cittadini in tempo di guerra', *PdF*, 11 June 1940.
- <sup>6</sup> Prefect to the Interior Ministry, 14 November, 1940, ACS, MI, Direzione Generale, Servizi di Guerra, b. 57.
- <sup>7</sup> Bergia, sottocapo di SM per la Difesa Territoriale, War Ministry, Ufficio Protezione Antiaerea e Difesa Coste, Sezione PA to all prefects, 7 June 1940, on evacuation, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>8</sup> Prefect to War Ministry, SM Territoriale, Ufficio PA, 15 July 1940, on the number of evacuees which Udine could accept, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>9</sup> Prefect, Udine, to Prefect, Turin, 11 July 1940, on evacuation to Udine, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>10</sup> Circular from Prefect Bofondi, 26 May 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>11</sup> Generale di Div. Luigi Gambelli, Direttore Centrale della PAA, to all prefects, 30 April 1940, on voluntary evacuation, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>12</sup> Telegram, Bocchini to all prefects, 21 June 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>13</sup> Prefect Udine to Prefect Turin, 24 June 1940, on applications for voluntary evacuation, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>14</sup> Prefect to Interior Ministry, 6 September 1939, on evacuation of Udine's hospitals and nurseries, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.2.
- <sup>15</sup> The Director of the *Istituto Provinciale per la Maternità e Infanzia* to Prefect, 13 May 1937, on the evacuation of the institution, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.2.
- <sup>16</sup> Prefect of Udine to the Interior Minister, 8 May 1939, ASU, AP, b.26, f.105.
- <sup>17</sup> Podestà, Tarcento, to Prefect, 21 June 1940, on evacuees in Tarcento, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>18</sup> Commissario Prefettizio, Attimis, to Prefect, 21 June 1940, on evacuees, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>19</sup> Podestà, Varmo, to Prefect, 21 June 1940, on evacuees, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.13.
- <sup>20</sup> Podestà, Faedis, to Prefect, 1 July 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>21</sup> See for example, Commissario, Zoppola, to Prefect, 15 July 1940, on evacuees from Rome, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>22</sup> Commissario Prefettizio, Pordenone, to Prefect, 1 July 1940, on evacuees, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>23</sup> Censor of evacuees carried out by the Prefettura on 20 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>24</sup> 'L'assistenza di Udine in favore degli sfollati', *PdF*, 7 July 1940.
- <sup>25</sup> Prefect to CPPAA, 21 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>26</sup> Bergia, Ministry of War, Ufficio Protezione Antiaerea e Difesa Coste, Sezione PAG, 4 October 1940, on the urban-rural shift of the population, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.3.
- <sup>27</sup> Prefect to Interior Ministry, 11 November 1940, ACS, MI, Direzione Generale Servizi di Guerra, b.57.
- <sup>28</sup> Undersecretary of State, U. Soddu, at the War Ministry to all Ministries, the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri, and the PNF, 27 Maggio 1940, on the evacuation of the population from large urban areas, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.14.
- <sup>29</sup> Prefect to the management of SAICI Industries, 14 December 1940, on air precautions at the factory, SAICI Torviscosa, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.8.
- <sup>30</sup> See reports from the various communes on the subject of sirens in factories, 6-7 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.8.

- <sup>31</sup> See, for example, Prefect to the firm S.An Fabbriche Riunite Estratti Concerie in Udine, 8 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.15.
- <sup>32</sup> The firm Giuseppe Bini to Prefect, 8 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.15.
- <sup>33</sup> The firm Coltellerie Riunite di Caslino e Maniago to Prefect, 7 April 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.15.
- <sup>34</sup> Prefect's report, 25 October 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.8.
- <sup>35</sup> Report by PAA inspector Generale di Divisione, Luigi Gambelli, 29 March 1940, on factory defence in the province of Udine, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>36</sup> See reports from various local authorities on the subject of sirens in factories, 6-7 June 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.8.
- <sup>37</sup> Factory reports on air defence precautions always indicated the hours and the numbers of shifts the factory operated. For example, the armaments factory S.A. Orio, which manufactured artillery shells exclusively for the Ministry of Defence, operated an early shift and a late shift, but no night shift. ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.8.
- <sup>38</sup> Report from SAICI Torviscosa company headquarters, Milan, 31 August 1939, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.4.
- <sup>39</sup> Report on factories (*Stabilimenti industriali*) by Inspector of air defences (PAA), General Luigi Gambelli, 29 March 1940, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.1.
- <sup>40</sup> Report from the factory of SAICI, undated, probably February 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.8.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Vigili scolte della Controaerei', *PdF*, 23 January 1942.
- <sup>42</sup> Cesare Miani, Il Comandante Provinciale, Comando Provinciale di Udine, 24 October 1942, on shelters in Udine, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>43</sup> Prefect to Comando Provinciale UNPA, 26 October 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.12.
- <sup>44</sup> 'Il Duce in un aeroporto di guerra', *PdF*, 30 March 1943.
- <sup>45</sup> Telegram from Interior Ministry, Rome, 24 November 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7. See also the Prefect's draft of ministerial statistics for insertion in the Prefettura's weekly bulletin, *Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura*, 24 November 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7. Also *PdF*, 25 November 1941.
- <sup>46</sup> Circular from Buffarini, MI, 11 November 1942, to all prefects, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.6.
- <sup>47</sup> Podestà, Udine, 28 November 1942, on free distribution of sand to civilians, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.6.
- <sup>48</sup> Giovanni De Luna, 'Torino in guerra: la ricerca di un'esistenza collettiva', in Micheletti and Pioggio (eds), *L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. Annali della fondazione «Luigi Micheletti»* 5, 897.
- <sup>49</sup> Luigi Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle camicie nere* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), 313.
- <sup>50</sup> Draft report (unsigned and undated) of the alarm of 17 March 1943, probably written by the Prefect, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>51</sup> Memo on air defence regulations for civilians entitled 'Avvertenze da osservare durante eventuali allarmi aerei nel capoluogo della provincia', 18 March 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>52</sup> Cesare Miani to Prefect, about the alarm of 17 March 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>53</sup> Colonel Alvio Della Bianca, Regional Commander of Civil Defence, Udine Section, to Prefect, 26 July 1937, on evacuation of psychiatric hospital in S.Osvaldo, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.2.
- <sup>54</sup> Letter from Cesare Miani to Prefect, March 1943, on raid 17 March, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>55</sup> Mario Gino, the leader of the local section of the Fascist Party, to the Prefect, 29 March 1943, on raid of 17 March, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>56</sup> Head of railway services in Trieste (Capo Stazione Superiore), to Prefect, 8 April 1943, on air raid warning of 17 March, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>57</sup> Report on the alarm of 17 March 1943 from the Podestà of Gemona del Friuli to Prefect, 18 March 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>58</sup> Report on alarm for air raid of 17 March from the Podestà of Latisana to Prefect, 23 March 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>59</sup> Report on alarm of 17 March from Podestà of Codroipo to Prefect, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>60</sup> Podestà of Pontebba to Prefect, 22 March 1943, on air raid of 17 March, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.
- <sup>61</sup> 10 Legione Milizia Artiglieria Controaerei, COMANDO DICAT, Udine, Il Console Comandante A. Valerio to Prefect, 23 March 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.

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<sup>62</sup> Cesare Miani to Prefect, 26 May 1943, on reports from the air raid warning of 24 May, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.

<sup>63</sup> Podestà, Udine, Ordine di Servizio 24, 1 June 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.7.

<sup>64</sup> Riservata Raccomandata Espresso, Censura di Guerra: weekly report from the Prefect to the Interior Ministry, DGPS, Divisione Polizia Politica, Rome, 10 April 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.36, f.135.

<sup>65</sup> Podestà, Codroipo, to Prefect, 24 May 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.

<sup>66</sup> Prefect to Podestà, Codroipo, 29 May 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., CPPAA, b.16.

<sup>67</sup> 'Il secondo scaglione di minori sfollati è giunto ieri mattina a Udine', *PdF*, 18 March 1943.

CHAPTER FIVE  
THE AMMASSI CAMPAIGN: FOOD POLICY 1940-43

The regime idealised the lives of the peasantry, and tried hard to convey the impression that Fascism placed great value on agricultural work, and on the contribution of farming communities to the national community and the war effort. For example, Mussolini remarked in a speech to peasants in January 1940 that modern warfare was economic warfare and that a poor harvest was equivalent to a battlefield defeat.<sup>1</sup> In the pages of *Il Popolo*, Fascist propaganda targeted peasants very carefully: traditional rural events in the agricultural calendar were usually commandeered by the Fascist Party. The PNF interfered in village gatherings by organising and publicising the harvest festivals and other events of the rural calendar, in a tone which was predominantly picturesque and at the same time patronising. Rural communities were often assembled with much fanfare to meet representatives of the Fascist Party or the Fascist agricultural workers' union (*Unione provinciale dei lavoratori dell'Agricoltura*) and these orchestrated events always depicted peasants as being orderly and obedient. For example, in *Il Popolo* there were sometimes descriptions of large rural parades, organised by the local section of the PNF, where peasants even carried agricultural tools, such as hoes (*la zappa*) or spades (*la vanga*), over their shoulders.<sup>2</sup> The events of the war, however, showed a quite different picture of peasant loyalty to the aims of the regime.

This chapter deals with how the peasantry in the province of Udine responded to the *ammassi* campaign. The *ammassi* were the state-controlled collection depots established by the Fascist authorities in the 1930s for pooling foodstuffs. During the war they were used by the regime to supply the population and to control price levels. They were, therefore, an important aspect of the Fascist war economy. Most historians agree that the *ammassi* were from the beginning very unpopular with the peasantry and that this had very serious consequences for the regime and for the war effort as a whole.<sup>3</sup> The situation in Udine was no exception to this.

The PNF issued national orders for inspectors, local party leaders (*segretari politici*) and the rank-and-file of the party to police the amassing in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> However, these orders were not always carried out. In some cases the PNF proved itself incapable of doing this work effectively. Mussolini's former Chief of Police,



Carmine Senise wrote in his memoirs *Quando Ero Capo della Polizia 1940-1943* that, in his opinion, the PNF should have limited its activities to propaganda and assistance but, because the party wanted to become involved in more aspects of the home front, this inevitably meant taking over state responsibilities, including the regulation of food prices, for which the party had no previous peacetime experience.<sup>5</sup> Other historians have noted the ineptness of the party with regard to food policy. De Felice, for example, has convincingly argued that the PNF failed to control food prices during the war not least because party officials tended to do things on their own initiative rather than collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>6</sup> According to De Felice, moreover, the party's involvement in the rationing system resulted in an increase in black market activities.<sup>7</sup> A local study by Brunella dalla Casa has demonstrated that in Bologna the PNF was unable to control food prices and rationing, which ultimately discredited the local section of the party, seen as being both inefficient and corrupt.<sup>8</sup> The case of Udine is somewhat different. As Paola Carucci has pointed out, the Fascist Party had an important role in food policy in some provinces (although the carabinieri, were responsible for actually policing the *ammassi* system). Whereas in other provinces the rationing system was firmly in the hands of the Prefect and the Questore.<sup>9</sup> This was, in fact, the case in Udine.

#### THE AMMASSI/CAMPAIGN

Most peasant-farmers in Friuli were subject to orders to amass various kinds of cereals, but, as the army was highly dependent for its transportation on horse-drawn vehicles, the state authorities also tried to collect fodder in order to distribute it to the armed forces, to local cattle-breeders and to dairy farmers. Amassing primarily targeted cereals, fats and milk products and it is worth noting that fruit and vegetables were never amassed or rationed during the war, but could be traded on the open market, albeit supposedly at state-controlled prices.

During the war, the first *ammassi* section of the farmers' consortium (*Consorzio agrario*) bought cereals from peasant-farmers, arranged for milling, and delivered flour to local communities. It also kept records of the amount of grain and flour stored in provincial mills. All this work was done under the direction of Sepral

(*Sezione Provinciale dell'Alimentazione*), the rationing authority, which was controlled by both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Corporations.<sup>10</sup> At local level, Sepral was run by a committee, the *Consiglio direttivo*. This committee was chaired by the Prefect,<sup>11</sup> as the official with overall responsibility for the distribution of food in the province.<sup>12</sup> This meant that the *ammassi* were kept out of the hands of actual Fascist Party officials.

Nevertheless, the *ammassi* system had a distinct ideological slant in that it was supposed to mobilise peasant-farmers, whom the Fascists depicted as hitherto excluded from the national community. Also, in its local broadsheet, the Udine PNF claimed that amassing foodstuffs fulfilled some important aims of the Fascist revolution in terms of increased state-control, and the drive for autarky. In this sense, amassing foodstuffs was wholly consistent with the Fascist version of the war as a perpetual, Darwinian struggle for life that would produce greater cohesion and solidarity within the national community because it meant that all Italians would get a fair share of the nation's food supply. According to them, amassing meant that everyone would have to make the same limited sacrifices necessary to achieve victory.<sup>13</sup>

In practical terms, the *ammassi* system forced peasant-farmers to hand over all their produce to the state, although peasant families were allowed to retain some grain for domestic consumption and for sowing. Udine forms a particularly important case study in the history of wartime food policy since, despite the poverty of Friulian agriculture, the food-producing province of Udine was nevertheless expected to supply markets in the comparatively affluent city of Trieste, which received little from its hinterland, the borderlands of Carso and Istria, especially during the war.<sup>14</sup> The contribution of Friulian peasants to the war effort was, therefore, of far more than simply local importance. In the first year of Italy's war, the categories of cereals that were amassed by farmers were limited to wheat, maize and rice. The reason for this was that, as Luigi Cavazzoli has argued, the regime was trying to interfere with food supply as little as possible at this point, in the belief that the war would be only a short conflict.<sup>15</sup> It should be remembered that the *ammassi* campaign began in the context of a comparatively quiet period of the war, from Autumn 1940 to Spring 1941, when the German armed forces were not involved in any major land

campaigns in the West. During this period, most people probably believed that the conflict was not set to continue, nor to broaden and would indeed soon be over.

Early in the war, *Il Popolo* tried to assure its readers that Italy had enough oil and fats for everyone to get a fair share even though it had been decided to ration popular commodities.<sup>16</sup> In practice, however, shortages soon appeared. On 1 October 1940 the regime introduced the rationing of oils, butter and lard and all other fats used for cooking or salad dressing. Italians were issued with new ration books (*carte annonarie*) including coupons (*buoni di prelevamento*) for half a litre of oil a month and 300 grams of butter or vice versa. At about this time, rationed foodstuffs made up less than half the daily intake of calories Italians needed and so people had to supplement their diets with items which were not rationed, but sold freely on the market. Paola Zagatti has argued that if the prices and availability of non-rationed foodstuffs had been properly supervised and controlled, this situation might have been workable, but during the conflict the price of non-rationed foodstuffs immediately began to rise and many rationed goods quickly appeared on the black market (*mercato nero* or *borsa nera*). People felt it was legitimate to buy foodstuffs from the black market because non-rationed commodities had disappeared, leaving them little choice.<sup>17</sup> As another historian, Vittorio Riferi, has demonstrated, there were three distinct phases in the wartime food shortages. In the first phase, the monthly ration was gradually reduced. In the second phase, the quality of rationed food declined; for example, water was added to milk and bread flour was adulterated with things like maize flour. Eventually, the distribution system itself failed to deliver goods and people experienced increasing shortages.<sup>18</sup>

During the period December 1940 to February 1941, it became clear that it was not to be just a short war. In the winter of 1940-41, the Italian army in Greece suffered its first big defeat of the war. Italy suffered other catastrophic defeats in Libya and Egypt and, in the spring of 1941, lost Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia. The East African Empire disintegrated and Italy was now totally dependent on Nazi Germany. As a result of the military situation, the categories of cereals to be amassed were extended to include barley and rye both of which had hitherto been allowed to be sold freely on the open market. In theory, this represented a further increase in state control of the war economy as farmers in Friuli now had to hand over more

produce to officials. In practice, however, the state did not have enough warehouses to amass all of the produce, and thus officials were forced to rely on the collaboration of peasant-farmers who were paid to store grain on their premises on behalf of the state.<sup>19</sup> This situation clearly made abuse of the system easier.

An article that appeared in March 1941 in *Il Popolo*, which criticised local peasant-farmers who were failing to hand over their entire maize harvest, shows that the local Party was already fully aware of how unpopular the *ammassi* were in rural areas.<sup>20</sup> It is also clear from ministerial circulars that the *ammassi* system was experiencing resistance from peasant-farmers throughout Italy at least as early as August 1941.<sup>21</sup> In Udine, according to carabinieri reports from July 1941, the peasant-farmers initially complied with the regulations and the police estimated that some ninety two thousand quintals had been handed over by July that year, which was much more than had been collected the previous summer. No doubt to reassure the regime, the carabinieri suggested that much of the success was due to the authorities' efforts to place depots for grain in the rural areas themselves so that peasant-farmers did not have to travel too far to hand over their grain.<sup>22</sup>

As impressive as carabinieri reports were about the *ammassi* campaigns of 1940-41, the police had little real evidence that peasants were in fact handing over their entire produce to the state because, in the early part of the war at least, accurate figures of past crop yields did not exist. This meant that, in practical terms, the Fascist authorities had no idea how much grain Friulian peasants were supposed to be bringing to the *ammassi*.<sup>23</sup> The absence of official records explains why government inspectors from Sepral were invariably accompanied by local peasant-farmers (*stimatori*) who were entrusted to estimate the crop yields of other farmers.<sup>24</sup> On the whole, peasant loyalty to the community was much stronger than to the state, however, and it is doubtful that many *stimatori* were willing to denounce fellow villagers to the police. As a result, there was probably a very wide margin of error in local government estimates of crop yields.

In the meantime, officials at the amassing warehouses were finding it difficult to convince many farmers to come forward with their produce. The *Centri ammassi del Consorzio Agrario* sent producers a card (*la cartolina di invito*) instructing them to either turn over their grain or to store it for the state on their premises (*alla*



*costituzione del deposito fiduciario*).<sup>25</sup> Here there is plenty of evidence to show that farmers resented the *ammassi* laws. For example, after the sending of the first card, it was not uncommon for the amassing depots to send a second or third card before farmers reluctantly handed over grain. During the winter of 1941-42, some peasant-farmers even claimed that the severe cold weather had prevented them from handing over grain, which led one inspector to remark sarcastically that he hoped that February's warmer weather would make peasants 'somewhat more conscientious'.<sup>26</sup>

#### RURAL COMMISSIONS FOR THE AMMASSI

According to an important ministerial circular issued in October 1941, the regime had no real control of the war economy in rural areas, and thus it was decided to establish commissions within farming communities to report infringements of the regulations to the Fascist authorities (*commissioni comunali*).<sup>27</sup> During this period, the Prefect was supposed to ensure that the rural commissions were not 'undermined by parochialism'.<sup>28</sup> In practice this was almost impossible. In many communities, the control commissions were reluctant to force local peasant-farmers to surrender their grain and instead asked them to come forward on a voluntary basis. The results were predictably poor.<sup>29</sup> The commissioners were not only supposed to prevent peasants beating the system, but also to accelerate the amassing of cereals because the authorities admitted that the campaign was 'losing momentum'.<sup>30</sup>

In practice, the commissioners whose job it was to oversee the amassing of cereals had an ambivalent attitude towards war economy regulations and the *ammassi*. Commissioners were Fascist Party members who wanted peasants to get behind the war effort and obey Fascist laws. At the same time, however, it was natural that commissioners wanted to retain as much food as possible in their own local district and so they felt the pull of rival allegiances. Also, Rome was far away, but the village was their source of identity and authority, and in small communities many commissioners were both local government officials and prominent farmers. An article entitled 'Mobilitare la terra' published in *Il Popolo* of 6 March 1941, for example, stated bluntly that the majority of Podestàs in Friuli were themselves from large rural families and hardly needed bureaucracy—statistics, investigations or



reports—to understand ‘the situation in the countryside’.<sup>31</sup> This article, which attempted to cajole Podestàs into mobilising peasant-farmers for the war effort, appears to admit that state interference in farming communities could cause resentment. Moreover, local allegiances meant that some commissions failed to report infringements to the Questore or the Prefect, which explains why the authorities could claim to be unaware of the true extent of resistance to war regulations in rural areas.<sup>32</sup> By January 1942, however, it was clear to even the Prefect that amassing in the province was rapidly declining.<sup>33</sup> The example of Udine suggests that the rural authorities, the Podestàs and the members of commissions, were extremely reluctant to comply with national orders and extend the state’s control of farming communities.

Moreover, police reports from Udine show that the carabinieri preferred to blame peasant-farmers rather than criticize the local government officials. For example, in December 1941, local carabinieri reports were noting that peasant-farmers, especially those who lived in the lowlands of Friuli, were unwilling to hand over their produce to the *ammassi* and that the commissions were forced to hold meetings in churches in an effort to convince peasants to comply with wartime regulations.<sup>34</sup> By January 1942, according to the Prefect, the amassing of cereals was in a downward spiral throughout the province.<sup>35</sup> At about this time, the Fascist Farmers’ Union (*Confederazione fascista degli Agricoltori, servizio acceleramento ammassi cereali*) wrote to the Ministry of Agriculture to complain that vast amounts of cereal were being sold on the black market in the province.<sup>36</sup> The same month, February 1942, the Union’s inspectors claimed that more than six hundred local farms had committed infringements by refusing to hand over maize—amounting to some four thousand quintals of grain—and that local commissions had deliberately withheld this amount from the *ammassi*.<sup>37</sup> The police and Fascist authorities were quick to accuse farmers and agricultural workers of having failed to amass grain. It is obvious that local commissions were turning a blind eye to much of the black market activities of peasant-farmers. As Luigi Ganapini has written, the rationing and food distribution system introduced by the Fascist regime seemed to take it for granted that people would use the black market at the very least to supplement their diet, otherwise it is difficult to explain such low rations.<sup>38</sup>

In Udine, one way in which the Questore tried to make peasant-farmers comply with wartime regulations was by deploying more police in rural areas during the amassing of cereals.<sup>39</sup> That the Questore insisted on this large police presence, demonstrates that the authorities did not have confidence in their ability to collect enough food. They expected resistance.

The village of Osoppo exemplifies the tendency of local government to resist the *ammassi* laws. According to Fascist regulations, the Osoppo community should have been amassing forage for the army in particular, which still relied heavily on horse-drawn transport. Investigations by Sepral on 25 September 1942, however, revealed the true extent of resistance to the *ammassi* campaign. In Osoppo, as in other communities, local government officials rented out council land to peasant-farmers, but Sepral discovered at least five peasant-farmers who were not officially listed as hay-producers even though their crops were on council land, and who were not handing over produce to the *ammassi*. The army, too, rented out the grounds of the local fort to another local farmer, whose illegal crop sprawled over 15,000 square metres of the military aerodrome. There is little doubt that the village authorities, both civil and military, connived with peasant-farmers to make large sums of money from crops which did not officially exist. The report from Osoppo is important in that Sepral blamed local government officials for the widespread infringements of the amassing laws.<sup>40</sup> The case of the local government officials and peasant-farmers conniving to retain crops in Osoppo also suggests that there were few, if any, inspections in the period 1940-42 and that local government authorities enjoyed quite wide autonomy.

Moreover, there is evidence that Osoppo was not a unique case: for example in the district of Latisana, the community openly refused to hand over grain, and as a result the authorities threatened to withdraw the town's permit to mill grain. Later in the war, such emergency measures were so unpopular that there were large and rowdy protests by rural inhabitants, mostly women. In a rural area near San Vito al Tagliamento, for example, in hostility to the closure of the only mill in the district, a noisy crowd of more than 500 protesters demanded that the authorities reopen the

mill. The women vented their feelings by removing the mill doors from their hinges and hiding them from the police. After about eight hours, the carabinieri managed to disperse the protesters at the mill, many of whom later thronged the main street shouting ‘we want bread!’ (*vogliamo pane!*).<sup>41</sup> Action on this scale—and there were other similar incidents at about this time—was undoubtedly provoked by scarcity and by high food prices. It demonstrates that rural inhabitants themselves were willing to fight back quite openly if the Fascist authorities tried to force communities to hand over grain.

The Prefect believed that most of the infringements of the *ammassi* rules were the result of millers refusing to comply with war economy regulations.<sup>42</sup> Peasant-farmers could easily avoid handing over grain to the *ammassi*, but in theory they had to have a milling ticket before they could turn cereals into flour. Millers played a leading role in the black market because they refused to implement the Fascist authorities’ strict practices for milling grain, and hence people had no difficulty in beating the rationing system and obtaining flour without a milling ticket.

Evidence from the Prefettura archive confirms this point. In Udine, as elsewhere in Italy, many millers accepted, or insisted on, payment in kind (*molenda in natura*). This was strictly prohibited in wartime, but remained common practice here. According to the *ammassi* laws, millers were not classified as food-producers and therefore were not entitled to store food or to withhold it for their own private consumption. Nevertheless, through payment in kind, millers were able to stockpile flour which they then exchanged with farmers for grain. The advantage of this system was that millers could avoid keeping accurate records of transactions with peasant-farmers and hence they did not need to require people to produce the state milling ticket. In a typical case which came before the court in Udine, a check by the rationing authority Sepral found one miller to have declared less than half the wheat which was actually stored in his mill.<sup>43</sup> It is important to bear in mind that there was a widespread belief in this period that millers were naturally corrupt and dishonest. In reality, however, millers were often shielded by local officials who, according to the Confederazione Fascista degli Industriali (*Servizio controllo macinazione per conto terzi*), were themselves not using milling tickets, a serious infringement of war economy regulations.<sup>44</sup> Evidence from Udine supports Cavazzoli’s suggestion that to

some extent the authorities tolerated the situation.<sup>45</sup> Giacomo Becattini and Nicolò Bellanca have gone further and suggested that local officials who were responsible for the rationing of foodstuffs were themselves often directly involved in the blackmarket.<sup>46</sup> Evidence from Udine shows that the authorities in farming communities were refusing to follow national orders which had been circulated by the Prefettura although I have found no evidence of Fascist officials actually operating on the black market.

Moreover, as millers and local government officials refused to use milling tickets, the Prefect was powerless to prevent vast quantities of grain from leaving the province. This explains why, during the Winter of 1940-41, there was a sudden shortage of maize flour that was so serious that the Prefect had to adopt emergency measures (*provvedimenti speciali*) to provide the province with grain—measures which undoubtedly involved distributing grain from the *ammassi* warehouses. In short, it was discovered that Udine's mills had sold large quantities of flour beyond the province (some 6265 quintals out of the 13913 assigned to Udine by the *Federazione dei Consorzi Agrari* to the province). The problem was that the majority of millers' customers were from other provinces and the relatively few customers from Udine did not need more flour. Hence the millers had been forced to sell maize flour to other provinces. Moreover, the drop in flour was in part due to a reduction in flour assigned to the province from 16,600 to 12,380 quintals.<sup>47</sup> As Renzo Martinelli has written, the disorganised aspects of food distribution system clearly revealed just how unprepared the Fascist regime was to fight a major war.<sup>48</sup>

Another reason the *ammassi* system was resented was that the new war economy made traditional rural farming habits illegal. A good example is bartering which was an integral part of the pre-war peasant economy in Udine. Peasant-farmers in the lowlands exchanged their produce with farmers in the mountains; for instance, grain was bartered for chestnuts or seed potatoes. Even though the *ammassi* system made bartering illegal, there is some evidence that, in practice, rural communities still continued to exchange flour for other commodities, especially wood, during the conflict.<sup>49</sup> In theory, war economy regulations were designed to compartmentalise rationing because food prices occasionally differed from province to province and regulations prevented black marketers from creating



shortages by 'exporting' foodstuffs to neighbouring provinces to profit from price fluctuations. In practice the situation was very different.

That said, the difficulties of trying to punish people for wartime infringements may be seen if we examine court records of the Tribunale di Udine for the period. Documents from the courts of Udine show that the local judiciary was remarkably tolerant of infringements of war economy regulations. Here we can see that judges rarely punished infringements of the war regulations with custodial sentences. A good example is the court's attitude towards peasant-farmers who hoarded grain. In theory, hoarding was an illegal way to beat the ration system and undermined the Fascist war aims of common sacrifice and solidarity on the home front. In practice, however, the Fascist authorities allowed food producers to withhold very generous amounts of grain during the war—much more than they received in peacetime—for family consumption and sowing, and inevitably peasants hoarded cereals that had been assigned to them and sold surplus amounts on the black market, usually to urban housewives. In this context, judges rarely punished women who bought food on the black market because the women themselves invariably pointed out that they were trying to provide large families with food. One woman, for example, declared during her trial in Udine that she had five children to feed.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, court records of trials against people accused of infringements of food regulations, show that judges were extremely tolerant and invariably came down on the side of peasant-farmers. They often stated that the law would not punish peasants who hoarded grain and sold it to others in that the cereal had been assigned to them and was thus a form of rural charity towards urban inhabitants, and a demonstration of solidarity towards fellow nationals (*altruismo e di umana solidarietà*). Courts did not find peasant-farmers guilty of serious crimes, but rather tended to impose fines for minor infringements of the war economy. For example, rather than imprison peasants and housewives for black market activities, the courts instead found defendants guilty of taking foodstuffs from the province of Udine to Trieste without the written permission of Sepral, a very minor infringement.<sup>51</sup> Also, peasant farmers who sold foodstuffs to urban inhabitants normally remained unpunished because city women never learned their full names or were perhaps reluctant to name peasants.



Moreover, most women tended to purchase tiny quantities of maize flour, or other foodstuffs, from several different peasant-farmers and hence it was impossible for the courts to unravel the individual transactions.

In many ways, the war economy and the thriving black market radically changed the relationship between the urban population and the peasants. Rural communities enjoyed a new power as basic provisions became increasingly scarce, and self-sufficiency and thrift became a matter of pride. Conversely, urban inhabitants were increasingly seen as supplicants; urban life lost much of its prestige as towns became wracked by worsening living conditions and rising inflation. Whereas pre-war urban society had looked down on rural inhabitants, with the strains of war, the countryside took on a new prestige. Large numbers of urban women, mostly from Trieste, travelled by bus or train to rural areas of Friuli to buy cereal on the black market. On one typical bus to Trieste, the police found some 640 kilograms of flour and another search of a train to Casarsa revealed that many of the passengers had suitcases full of maize flour. According to the urban inhabitants of Trieste who were questioned by the police, they had paid peasant-farmers in Friuli very high prices.<sup>52</sup> Giacomo Becattini and Nicolò Bellanca have suggested that peasant-farmers were reluctant to hand over grain to the *ammassi* because the state paid them very little for their produce.<sup>53</sup> This seems to have been the case in Udine too, as contemporary reports suggest that one reason why peasant-farmers refused to hand over their produce to the *ammassi* was because it was much more profitable to sell their produce on the black market.<sup>54</sup>

With reference to Tuscany in the period 1941 to 1944, Becattini and Bellanca have pointed out the population's ambivalent attitude to the black market which was sometimes viewed as exploitation, at others seen as a form of popular solidarity: on the one hand it was thought of as speculation but on the other hand it was described as just another way to make ends meet (*arte di arrangiarsi*).<sup>55</sup> Evidence suggests that the black market in Udine was already on a vast scale as early as September 1942. According to the Prefect, Udine's black market was made up of the illegal traffic of tiny quantities of food, transported from the countryside to urban areas by peasant-farmers. Couriers were used who generally only transported small amounts that they could hide from the authorities or convince police checks that the food was for their

own consumption. It was this black market in tiny quantities which in no small measure led to the scarcity of food which should have been handed over to the *ammassi*.<sup>56</sup>

The Segretario Federale of Udine was alarmed by the black market and noted in 1942<sup>57</sup>:

I have recently had occasion to travel by rail in the province and have noticed that in many railway stations there is a considerable movement of produce from our province to neighbouring provinces. People, mostly Slovene women, travel to several rural centres in our province where they buy flour, beans, maize flour and then freely take suitcases full of food to other provinces. Propaganda for food producers has had no effect given the attraction of lucrative and easy profits and the desire to make money is stronger than a sense of duty which all Italians should feel. If the authorities are not able to curb this illegal activity, the regulations for the *ammassi* will become meaningless, with serious consequences for solidarity on the home front.

A good example of the peasant-farmers' desire to profit from the black market was the sale of potatoes direct to consumers. The official price that the *ammassi* gave peasants was 75 lire, which was half the amount that shopkeepers charged the public. It is not difficult to see why both peasants and consumers were happy to exchange potatoes directly for between 100 and 120 lire per quintal and why there was no financial incentive for peasants to hand over their potatoes to the *ammassi*. In this case, the police report suggested that a fairer price for peasant-farmers at the *ammassi* would have significantly reduced black market activities.<sup>58</sup>

The rationing system had a contradictory impact and created social conflict in that it was perceived to be unfair also by people who lived in semi-urban communities fringing the provincial capital, communities which still maintained their rural character. As Ganapini has suggested, any discussion about the working class in the period cannot ignore villages that were engulfed by the industrial suburbs of large towns and cities.<sup>59</sup> A good example of this is the district of Pesian di Prato, near Udine, whose residents, according to the Podestà, particularly resented the rationing system because Fascist regulations supposed that nearly all the inhabitants of semi-urban communities kept small farmyard animals such as rabbits and poultry (*animali*

*di cortile*) for their own consumption. In practice, however, the vast majority of people in Pasion di Prato were factory or clerical workers not agricultural workers, but were nevertheless classed as peasant families, according to the rationing laws, and hence received a much smaller meat ration than urban families who lived in the centre of Udine.<sup>60</sup> Later in the war, an incensed factory worker living in a semi-rural area of Friuli wrote an anonymous letter to Mussolini saying 'Don't the children of factory workers in rural areas need the same amount of food as the children of urban workers?'<sup>61</sup>

From 1940 onwards, people in remote rural areas grew increasingly critical of the *ammassi*, especially in the mountainous area of Carnia. In September 1942, for example, the Podestà of Aiello complained bitterly that 200 grams of salami had been handed out to every household which meant that people living alone received 200 grams, whilst large families with ten or more children received only 20 grams or less per person. Shortly afterwards, people in Carnia experienced serious shortages, including of fats, butter, and oil which had not been distributed in the area for more than three weeks.<sup>62</sup>

The perceived unfairness of the *ammassi* system is most clearly revealed in the case of cheese-producing households in the town of Gemona and illustrates one of the central problems of the system—the fact that rural people quite naturally wanted to retain local food produce in times of scarcity. Gemona was a small town in the hilly area of northern Friuli. In the lowlands, maize flour was important to rural families whose diet consisted of polenta, milk and cheese, but peasant families in Gemona ate more milk and cheese because of the lack of maize flour in upland areas. The whole economy of Gemona was geared towards producing dairy products, notably high-quality cheese, which catered to the daily needs of the population. According to the *ammassi* laws, however, peasant-farmers were supposed to hand over all their produce to the *ammassi* in exchange for cheese of an inferior quality. Although in theory this was probably a 'fair share' of the nation's food supply, it was somewhat unrealistic to expect rural communities to cooperate with this system because local families naturally assumed that urban inhabitants in Trieste, among other places, were happily eating high-quality cheese from Friuli whilst they were burdened with processed cheese of very different quality.<sup>63</sup>

In any case, it was clear to people living in Gemona that the *Ente nazionale fascista delle corporazioni* was prioritizing Trieste by requisitioning milk for the city on alternate days from dairies in Gemona. Local women, whose livelihood as producers of butter and cheese was directly threatened by this wartime requisition, protested that war economy regulations effectively plundered the staple diet of the impoverished population of Gemona. Because wartime regulations were a direct threat to the local economy, which had hitherto been the economy of the free market, the Podestà of Gemona was naturally reluctant to enforce Fascist laws and in fact told the Prefect that he was sympathetic to the protests of local women and cheese producers.<sup>64</sup>

The Podestà of Gemona used arguments related to Fascism and war to present an image of peasant-farmers as good, patriotic Italians; but also to demonstrate that the peasant-farmers were poor because they were numerous. For example, the Podestà noted that Mussolini had demanded demographic increase, and in fact Gemona listed several families with ten or more children. Some 300 families were listed as having contributed to the Demographic Campaign by having seven or more children. Also Gemona had provided peasant infantry for the Alpini regiment of mountain troops and had suffered 21 dead and 10 missing in action. In a terse comment, the Podestà noted that Gemona's milk producers had only a single cow in each household, including the large families. If they were pushed around, he stated, peasant-farmers would probably resort to direct action and hand in less milk.<sup>65</sup> In Gemona at least, the effect of *ammassi* regulations was to discredit the Fascist authorities in the eyes of peasant-farmers. The evidence from Udine supports Ganapini's assertion that the failure of the rationing system resulted in social conflict. In particular, the case of Udine reveals that rural inhabitants resented the idea of 'a fair share' of the nation's food supply because it meant that their community would have to give up small luxuries which were locally produced and were indeed part of the benefit of living on the land.

It is worth noting, however, as Luigi Cavazzoli has pointed out, that milk did not become increasingly scarce simply because of a reduction in supply from rural areas but rather as a result of an increase in demand for milk as a substitute for other foodstuffs which were expensive and of poor quantity.<sup>66</sup> This explains why the

practice of diluting milk with water became so widespread in Udine. One example, was the case of the owner of a milk shop in Via de Rubeis, Venuti Erminia, who was arrested for selling milk which was about 10% water according to the laboratory tests. She was fined 120 lire in addition to the trial costs.<sup>67</sup> Another shopkeeper, Pia Gorasso, was found guilty of selling milk that had been diluted with water. The health inspectors (*vigili sanitari*) took a sample from the shop and the laboratory found that the milk was diluted by about 23-24 per cent.<sup>68</sup>

Before the war, about six hundred women (*villiche*) from rural areas delivered milk around the doors in the town of Udine, but new wartime price regulations prevented them from earning a living by reselling milk to urban communities because the wholesale price was the same as the list price.<sup>69</sup> People were dismayed when milk sellers disappeared from the streets, for even in wartime urban women still expected to provide their families with milk at breakfast.

By mid-1942, women were to be found queuing at five o'clock in the morning at milk distribution centres, and sometimes they had to wait three or four hours before receiving the ration, or being turned away by the authorities. In fact, it was not uncommon for crowds of two or three hundred women to be left without milk. One mother in Udine observed that

After two hours of queuing many people went away without any milk at all. We have the ration books (*libretto*) and we ordered milk but then women from other districts come along saying their dairies are closed and they receive milk both here and there also for making butter. For all dairies the order should be to give milk to those who ordered first and then the others. Instead even those of us who have five in our family get half a litre and sometimes one litre of milk. Some people come with four bottles saying that its for four families and who is to know? People should queue themselves because with this system some are getting milk whilst others receive nothing at all after two hours of queuing.<sup>70</sup>

This letter sent to the Prefect sheds light on some of the tensions and complex animosities between women from different districts of the town, especially those who had large families to feed. Furthermore, women were particularly annoyed by the military authorities because soldiers themselves regularly jumped the queue to collect milk for army officers' families.



Another example of this inequality was the *ammassi* of fats. Pig owners were supposed to handover fats to the *ammassi*. That said, in Friuli at least, most of the people who were pig owners on paper were not peasant-farmers or landowners, but waged factory workers, office staff and housewives, who, in a deeply-rooted tradition, bought a piglet at market at springtime, fed it on grass gathered in the countryside and perhaps some potatoes over summer and autumn, and then slaughtered the animal in November or December when it was mature, though usually still somewhat lean.<sup>71</sup> In fact, later in the war when it became increasingly difficult to find fodder for pigs, some of the slaughtered animals were so lean that the local rationing authority had to give pig owners ration coupons for meat.<sup>72</sup> Pig owners who were not actually peasant-farmers felt that there was little government incentive to keep pigs to supplement waged work if workers who devoted time and energy to keeping pigs then had to hand over fats to the *ammassi*. Thus the case of pig owners shows, the *ammassi* laws occasionally backfired in that war economy regulations actually ended up by discouraging some categories of people from rearing animals for meat.

In addition, the amassing of fats was unpopular with peasant-farmers not least because the blanket war economy regulations sent from Rome paid no attention to local differences in agricultural practice. For example, it was well known that pigs in the mountainous area of Carnia were on average much smaller than the pigs in the lowland regions of Friuli because the latter were fattened on spoiled maize and wheat. By contrast, the pigs in the mountains were lean because Carnia was not an arable farming area. Despite this fact, according to the *ammassi* laws, a family of fifteen people in Carnia with a sixty kilogram pig was expected to hand over the same amount of fats, two kilograms of lard, as a family of seven in the lowlands with a 200 kilogram pig.<sup>73</sup> Simple in theory, the amassing of fats generated real hostility towards the regime. It is not difficult to see why many people deeply distrusted Fascist rhetoric which claimed that all Italians were making the same sacrifices and getting a fair share of the nation's food. In the case of fats, the point at issue was quite complex. The result of people's widespread reluctance to hand over fats to the *ammassi* was that by August 1943, the fat ration assigned for each individual per month was lower than the minimum amount required for nutrition. The milk

allowance was also well below that required by civilians and this shortage caused particular anxiety among the public because milk was considered vital for small children and the elderly.<sup>74</sup>

Later in the war, one local Fascist leader described how the rationing system had degenerated into farce. Officials, he wrote, thought the food controls were merely 'a sterile bureaucratic procedure' and even police fines (*verbali di denuncia*) for transgressors who were caught red-handed no longer had the persuasive or restrictive nature that the measure had once had. Even the rules concerning the maximum size of luggage on trains were completely ignored by railway personnel. The loads of grain being regularly smuggled by passengers in October 1943 was often so heavy, for example as much as two quintals, that railway workers had to assist passengers with suitcases of flour to help them board the trains.<sup>75</sup> By December 1943 the amassing of cereals had declined to such an extent that the *ammassi* were described as 'ludicrous' by the Prefect.<sup>76</sup> With the standard ration becoming increasingly inadequate, some local government officials began to give out extra rations, especially of sugar, for civilians under the pretence that they were ill and needed food supplements.<sup>77</sup> Here in Udine, similar to the situation described by other historians in other provinces, the perceived inequalities of the system generated a great deal of animosity towards the regime.

Rationing allowed the regime to discriminate against certain sections of the population which also caused social conflict. For example, the local branch of the Fascist industrial workers' union (*Confederazione dei Lavoratori dell'Industria, Unione Provinciale di Udine*) organised food outlets on factory premises so that workers involved in the war effort had their own shops that sold rationed foodstuffs and other goods that were otherwise hard to find. The union's aim was to promote greater solidarity among workers, promote Fascism, and prioritise the needs of civilians who were directly involved in producing armaments and materiel.

The town council in Udine, however, opposed the idea because factory outlets—administered by the ancillary organisation of the PNF—were exempt from local trade regulations that required shopkeepers to buy a license from the town council and pay a large deposit. Unsurprisingly, much of the hostility towards the party's initiative in this case came from the middle class business community which

viewed workers' shops as unfair and unwanted competition.<sup>78</sup> The Fascist union's outlets are but one example of how Fascist initiatives to build consensus for the regime and to increase national solidarity and cohesion rode roughshod over pre-war trading laws, inevitably generating hostility and divisions within the community.

To conclude, in practical terms, the safeguarding of the nation's food supply involved a much greater degree of state-regulation that largely excluded rural communities from the distribution network. The case of Udine suggests that local government officials interpreted this to mean that the regime did not fully trust rural communities to protect the nation's food supply during wartime. In Udine, the greater degree of state-regulation was deeply resented not only by peasant-farmers, whom Fascist authorities were unable to completely exclude from the distribution network, but also by rural officials themselves, who were unwilling to comply with national orders to police the *ammassi* campaign.

The Fascists recognised that the dramatic aspects of modern warfare—aerial bombardments, evacuation and food shortages—would have a much greater impact on large urban communities where the cost of living was higher, and therefore the regime had to prioritise the needs of the industrial working population in the large cities to minimise popular dissent. But the reality of the much trumpeted *ammassi* campaign was quite contrary to the Fascists' revolutionary rhetoric. In fact communities like Osoppo and Gemona sought to insulate themselves from wartime regulations and resist the *ammassi* not least because many inhabitants believed that they were not getting a fair share of the nation's food supply. There is little doubt that local government authorities connived with peasant-farmers to commit infringements of the amassing laws. The *ammassi* campaign failed to fulfil important war aims in that it generated serious social conflict not cohesion and ultimately did not turn peasant-farmers into convinced supporters of the regime. The example of Udine, moreover, suggests that one of the reasons the rationing system failed was that the authorities in farming communities were not prepared to follow national orders for a war economy and hand over their control of food supply to state bureaucracies. The strength of local ties, therefore, led them to turn a blind eye to very widespread flouting of the rules in their areas.

## Endnotes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> See Mussolini's speech at 'La premiazione dei vincitori del V Concorso Nazionale del Grano e dell'Azienda Agraria', *Foglio D'Ordini*, 256, 22 January 1940.

<sup>2</sup> See for example 'Fervida giornata del cons. naz. Lai. fra i lavoratori friulani dell'agricoltura', *PdF*, 11 August 1940.

<sup>3</sup> C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Military Administration of Italy 1943-1945* (London: HMSO, 1957), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Telegram, PNF Secretary Adelchi Serena, to all prefects, 3 August 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>5</sup> Carmine Senise, *Quando Ero Capo della Polizia 1940-1943. Memorie di Colui che seppe tutto* (Città di Castello: Nicola Ruffolo Editore, 1946), 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*. 1. *L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943*. 2. *Crisi e agonia del regime*, 968-970.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 970-971.

<sup>8</sup> Brunella dalla Casa, 'La PNF e la mobilitazione bellica', in Brunella dalla Casa and Alberto Preti (eds), *Bologna in guerra 1940-1945* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995), 89-90.

<sup>9</sup> See Paola Carucci, 'Il Ministero dell'Interno: prefetti, questori e ispettori generali', in Angelo Ventura (ed.), *Sulla crisi del regime fascista 1938-1943. La società italiana dal "consenso" alla Resistenza. Atti del convegno nazionale di studi. Padova, 4-6 novembre 1993* (Padua: Istituto veneto per la storia della Resistenza, 1995), 37.

<sup>10</sup> However, the price of fish, was regulated by a different authority—the Commissariato Generale della Pesca.

<sup>11</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300, AMG Udine, 122, Box 5303, Report of 9 September 1944 on the organisation of civilian economic agencies, HQ Region 12.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram, Mussolini to all prefects, 10 May 1941, on the consumption of cereals, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>13</sup> See for example 'Razionamenti e giustizia sociale', *PdF*, 9 March 1941.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Maria Vinci, 'Trieste in guerra', in *Qualestoria* 1 (1992), 83.

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Cavazzoli, 'L'agricoltura mantovana nell'economia di guerra: produzione e distribuzione', in *L'Italia in guerra 1940-1943. Annali della fondazione Luigi Micheletti*, 5, 529.

<sup>16</sup> 'Le norme ministeriali per il razionamento degli olii e dei grassi', *PdF*, 1 October 1940.

<sup>17</sup> Paola Zagatti, 'Il Problema dell'alimentazione', in Dalla Casa and Preti (eds), *Bologna in guerra 1940-1945*, 225.

<sup>18</sup> Vittorio Rifani, 'Una città industriale nella guerra: alimentazione, condizioni di vita e lavoro a Sesto San Giovanni 1940-1943', in *Istituto milanese per la storia della resistenza e del movimento operaio, Annali*, 4 (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1995), 493-494.

<sup>19</sup> Circular from Ministry of Agriculture 'Ammasso dei cereali e delle fave', 29 May 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>20</sup> 'Per gli agricoltori. Ammasso di granoturco', *PdF*, 11 March, 1941.

<sup>21</sup> Circular from Ministry of Agriculture 'Evasione all'ammasso grano', 6 August, 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>22</sup> Carabinieri report 'Conferimento grano agli ammassi' by Colonel Antonio Mandelli, 28 July, 1941. See also the report from Presidente, Consorzio Provinciale tra i Produttori dell'Agricoltura, Udine on regulating the *ammassi*, 21 July 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Agriculture circular from Pareschi to all prefects, February 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>24</sup> Memo 'Promemoria Acceleramento ammassi', 9 February 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>25</sup> Ispettore Provinciale Acceleramento ammasso to Prefect, 17 January, 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>26</sup> Diego Giorgi, Ispettorato Provinciale di Udine, Confederazione Fascista degli Agricoltori to Unione Fasc. Lavoratori dell'Agricoltura, Unione Prov.fasc. degli Agricoltori, 25 February 1942, on the *ammassi* campaign, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.

<sup>27</sup> These commissions were headed by the Podestà and included the *Segretario del Fascio*, the local carabinieri commander and representatives of Fascist agricultural unions.



- <sup>28</sup> Circular from Agricultural Minister, Tassinari, 'Conferimento dei cereali e delle fave agli ammassi', 28 October 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>29</sup> Consorzio provinciale tra i Produttori dell'Agricoltura Udine, Sezione della Cerealicoltura, 20 December 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>30</sup> Circular from Agricultural Minister, Tassinari 'Conferimento dei cereali e delle fave agli ammassi'.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Mobilitare la terra', *PdF*, 6 March 1941.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Inoltro dei verbali di contravvenzioni annonarie', in *Il Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura di Udine*, 19, 1 May 1943.
- <sup>33</sup> Prefect to all Podestàs, 9 January, 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>34</sup> Carabinieri report by Guglielmo Zancaner, 9 December, 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>35</sup> Prefect to Podestàs, 9 January, 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>36</sup> Ministry of Agriculture to Prefect, 10 February 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>37</sup> Ministry of Agriculture to Prefect, 14 February 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>38</sup> Luigi Ganapini, 'Lotte operaie, Milano', in Luigi Ganapini and Massimo Legnani (eds), *Operai e contadini nella crisi italiana del 1943/1944* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1974), 146.
- <sup>39</sup> Prefect to Questore, and carabinieri, 21 August 1941, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>40</sup> Report from Sepral Udine on the amassing of hay in Osoppo, 25 September 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>41</sup> Telegram from Maresciallo Cane, Carabinieri of San Vito al Tagliamento, to Carabinieri Headquarters, Rome. Undated, probably April or May 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.36. f.136.
- <sup>42</sup> Prefect's report on 'Disciplina mulini', 28 February 1942, on the subject of millers, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>43</sup> Sentence 262, 19 June 1942, ASU, Tribunale Penale di Udine, 1942.
- <sup>44</sup> Circular from Prefect 'Disciplina dei molini', *Il Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura di Udine*, 23 January, 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>45</sup> Luigi Cavazzoli, 'L'agricoltura mantovana nell'economia di guerra: produzione e distribuzione', 529.
- <sup>46</sup> Giacomo Becattini and Nicolò Bellanca, 'Economia di guerra e mercato nero: note e riflessioni sulla Toscana', in *Italia contemporanea*, 165 (1986), 12.
- <sup>47</sup> See the court case brought against various mill owners, Udienza 160, 21 March 1941, ASU, Tribunale di Udine, 1941.
- <sup>48</sup> Renzo Martinelli (ed.), *Il fronte interno a Firenze 1940-1943. Lo spirito pubblico nelle 'informazioni fiduciarie' della polizia politica* (Florence: Università degli Studi di Firenze Dipartimento di Storia, 1989), 7-8.
- <sup>49</sup> In 1940 about 75 kilograms of flour was exchanged for one quintal of wood.
- <sup>50</sup> Sentence 257 of Angela Ferlan of Trieste, 17 June 1942, Tribunale Penale di Udine 1942.
- <sup>51</sup> See for example, sentences 175, 177 to 179, 181, 183 to 190, ASU, Tribunale Penale di Udine, 8 May 1942.
- <sup>52</sup> Provincial Inspector for the Confederazione Fascista degli Agricoltori to Prefect on the subject of amassing, 5 February 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.42.
- <sup>53</sup> Giacomo Becattini and Nicolò Bellanca, 'Economia di Guerra e mercato nero: note e riflessioni sulla Toscana', in *Italia contemporanea*, 165 (1986), 14-15.
- <sup>54</sup> See for example *Il Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura di Udine*, 52, 18 December, 1943.
- <sup>55</sup> Becattini and Bellanca, in 'Economia di Guerra e mercato nero: note e riflessioni sulla Toscana', 14-15.
- <sup>56</sup> Circular from Prefect De Beden, *Il Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura di Udine*, 52, 18 December, 1943.
- <sup>57</sup> Report from Mario Gino, Segretario Federale di Udine, to Prefect, 9 November 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.
- <sup>58</sup> Carabinieri report from Comandante Matteo Lecce to Prefect, 6 October 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.35, f.132-f.133.
- <sup>59</sup> Luigi Ganapini, 'Protagonisti del conflitto sociale', in Luigi Ganapini (ed.) *L'Italia alla metà de XX secolo. Conflitto sociale, resistenza, costruzione di una democrazia* (Milan: Guerini e associati, 2005), 21.
- <sup>60</sup> Podestà Pasion di Prato to Prefect, 18 August 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.35, f.132-133.
- <sup>61</sup> Anonymous letter to Mussolini, postmarked 22 March 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.



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- <sup>62</sup> Podestà of Aiello to Sezione provinciale dell'alimentazione (SEPRAL), Udine, 1 September 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.35, f.132-133.
- <sup>63</sup> Report from the Confederazione fascista degli Agricoltori, signed by Alfio Battini, 18 September, 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.
- <sup>64</sup> Report from the Podestà of Gemona to Prefect, 17 August 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.35, f.132-133.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 10 October 1942.
- <sup>66</sup> Cavazzoli, 'L'agricoltura mantovana nell'economia di guerra: produzione e distribuzione', 529.
- <sup>67</sup> Sentenza nella causa penale contro Venuti Erminia. Hearing of 20 February 1941, ASU, Tribunale di Udine, 1941.
- <sup>68</sup> Sentenza nella causa penale contro Gorasso Pia. Hearing of 20 February 1941, ASU, Tribunale di Udine, 1941.
- <sup>69</sup> 'Il rifornimento del latte a Udine', *PdF*, 7 November 1940.
- <sup>70</sup> Handwritten letter from Teresa Moro to Prefect (undated but probably August 1942), ASU, Gab. Pref., b.35, f.132.
- <sup>71</sup> Report from the provincial veterinary consortium to the Podestà of Chiusaforte, 11 October 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.
- <sup>72</sup> Podestà, Chiusaforte, to Prefect, 16 October 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.
- <sup>73</sup> Report by Alfio Battini, head of the Confederazione fascista degli Agricoltori, 18 September, 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.
- <sup>74</sup> See Report 'L'andamento economico del Friuli durante il mese di agosto 1943', Consiglio provinciale delle corporazioni Udine, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.51.
- <sup>75</sup> Segretario Provinciale, Federazione Fascista degli Artigiani to Prefect, 19 October 1943, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.43.
- <sup>76</sup> *Il Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura di Udine*, 52, 18 December 1943.
- <sup>77</sup> *Il Bollettino Atti Ufficiali della Prefettura di Udine*, 18, 22 April 1944.
- <sup>78</sup> Confederazione Fascista dei Lavoratori dell'Industria, Unione Provinciale di Udine, Segretario Augusto Tridenti to Prefect, 29 October 1942, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.41.

CHAPTER SIX  
THE RSI DURING GERMAN OCCUPATION 1943-45

The psychological impact of the Allied invasion of French North Africa in 1942 on Italian public opinion was profound. The landings created a new war front on the Tunisian border and made an all-out assault on mainland Italy inevitable. In reality, however, it was the catastrophic defeat of the army on the Russian Front that proved *the* decisive psychological blow to Italy's war. Mussolini had insisted on sending an Italian expeditionary force to help Germany attack Russia, but the infantry were not properly trained or equipped for the mechanised warfare on the Eastern Front and the demoralised Italian divisions were ripped to pieces by the overwhelmingly superior forces of the Red Army. Defeat on the Russian Front also marked a dramatic deterioration in relations between Germany and Italy. In practical terms, Italy had suffered military defeats in Libya and Egypt (December-February 1941), Russia (November 1942-February 1943), and Tunisia (January-May 1943) that eliminated a total of 34 Italian divisions. The army and the Party clashed over responsibilities, in an atmosphere of impending crisis, but Italy's war was already irretrievably lost.

As a result of the defeats and war weariness on the home front, there was a crisis in public morale which culminated in big industrial strikes in March 1943. On 5 March, thousands of workers at the Rasetti factory and the Mirafiori plant in Turin staged a prolonged stoppage. The protests were primarily against the declining living conditions in the industrial cities, but many of the 100,000 workers involved in the strike were making a political statement too. The reaction of the Fascist authorities to the industrial unrest in the north revealed the weakness of the regime which did little to punish the workers despite the fact that the factories were under martial law.

On 10 July, the Allied armies landed in Sicily and encountered virtually no resistance from Italian soldiers, many of whom actually welcomed the invaders. It was clear that the entry of the Allies into the Italian peninsula was imminent. At the same time, support for the regime was disintegrating as the vast majority of Italians could see that the war was lost.

The Fascist leaders (*gerarchi*) were themselves divided on whether or not to withdraw from the war. At the last meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on the night

of 24-25 July 1943, the majority agreed on a motion to restore military command to the King, who was the legal head of state. This provoked the fall of Mussolini and the regime. It is worthwhile noting that the coup d'état was not the result of massive popular pressure, but rather of moves by Fascist dissidents who had judged that Mussolini had become a liability and who had conspired to withdraw from the war.

Marshal Pietro Badoglio formed a new non-Fascist government that was nevertheless a military dictatorship and in no sense anti-Fascist. Badoglio had been a major beneficiary of Fascism. He had been an army commander in Ethiopia and had been made Duke of Addis Ababa after the invasion of Ethiopia. At the outbreak of the Second World War he was Chief of the General Staff. He was dismissed, however, after the fiasco of the Greek campaign. The period known as the 'Forty-Five Days' began with huge popular peace demonstrations as most people assumed the end of the regime meant an end to the war. Badoglio issued a proclamation promising to continue the war on the side of Germany, but secretly initiated slow negotiations with the Allies to withdraw Italy from the war.

On 3 September an armistice agreement was reached between the Allies and the Italians and on 8 September, the eve of Allied landings on the Italian mainland, Eisenhower announced that Italy had surrendered unconditionally. The Italian armed forces stopped fighting the Allies. However, Italy did not officially become an ally, but was given the somewhat ambivalent status of 'co-belligerent'.

The king, who was now head of the Italian armed forces, abandoned Rome to its fate, and fled south, together with Badoglio, to Brindisi. The Germans seized the capital and dissolved the Italian armed forces. A few days later, the Germans occupied the whole of northern Italy and, although a few Italian infantry units resisted for a short period of time, without orders from the general staff, the vast majority of soldiers disbanded.

On 10 September 1943, Hitler appointed a Nazi official, Friedrich Rainer, to administer the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine. This meant that Udine was effectively under the direct control of a German Gauleiter. Rainer, who was originally from Carinthia, had been an official in the Habsburg Empire before 1918 and, according to F.W. Deakin, regarded himself as fulfilling a historic mission to annex the regions once more to the Reich.<sup>1</sup> A Higher SS and Police Chief, Odilo

Globocnik, a protégé of Himmler, was appointed as head of the German police services. Globocnik was not German. Born in Trieste, his father was Slovene and his mother Hungarian. As a young man he had moved to Austria where he became a member of the local NSDAP and a prominent Nazi in the *Anschluß*. Thus, Globocnik was quite familiar with the region and its politics because, through the German Consulate, he had had contact with Nazi officials in Trieste during the 1930s. During the war, Globocnik was transferred to northeast Italy from a career helping to exterminate two million Jews in Poland. Under his command, the SS dominated the occupation of northeast Italy. It is worthwhile noting that there were several German police forces in the town of Udine: SS Protection Squads (*Schutzstaffeln*), the regular German military police (*Ordnungspolizei*), and the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst* or SD). All played a role in policing the province. In addition, even the German Nazi Party (NSDAP) had a local office.

The Germans occupied the province of Udine with little difficulty after the Italian armed forces withdrew from the war. On September 12, the German army crossed the Italian border at Tarvisio and a small armoured column occupied the town of Udine itself that evening. Infantry troops surrounded the Prefettura, the Questura, and other important institutions, including the post and telegraph office and the local branch of the national bank (*Banca d'Italia*), and set up roadblocks and requisitioned hotels. German troops also surrounded the barracks of the Eighth Alpini Regiment and disarmed, arrested, and later deported the garrison to Germany in railway carriages. The same evening, as a young deserter from the Italian army recalled, German infantry erected tents in the gardens of the First World War memorial.<sup>2</sup>

The officers and men of the Italian army did not oppose the occupation of Udine. Nor did they immediately transfer their allegiance to the German army. Some, like Alberto Cosattini, the soldier son of the man who was to become Udine's first post-war mayor, managed to escape from the Germans, and join the Resistance movement. According to one local historian, Giampaolo Gallo, when the German armed forces crossed the Italian border at Tarvisio, there was a meeting of local anti-Fascists who called on the Italian army to fight the Germans, or at least hand over

their weapons to the civilian population, but, without orders from the High Command, the vast majority of soldiers were unwilling to oppose the occupation.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, in central Italy, on 12 September, a special SS commando unit rescued Mussolini from imprisonment on Gran Sasso mountain and flew him to Munich the next day. Hitler decided that Mussolini should lead a new Fascist government to assist the German war effort and installed him at Salò, a small town on the west side of Lake Garda on the northern frontier. Mussolini was unable to persuade the Germans that Rome should be the seat of the new Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica sociale italiana* or RSI) and to most Italians this was another sign of the disintegration of Italy. Rome was designated an open city and politically neutral. Mussolini publicly committed himself to rebuilding the Italian army on the basis of a draft in northern Italy. In theory, the RSI was a return to the revolutionary origins of Fascism, without the conservative monarchy.

#### THE ITALIAN SOCIAL REPUBLIC

This chapter focuses on some aspects of the German occupation of Udine. It examines the role of Italian collaborators and in particular, the military operations of the RSI against civilians (known as the *rastrellamenti*). De Felice has argued that Mussolini agreed to return to power because he alone could ensure that Italy avoided the fate of Poland under German rule.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, one aim of this chapter is to examine the extent to which the RSI really did shield the local population from the excesses of Nazi rule in this area, as De Felice has suggested.

In writing and re-writing the history of the Resistance, Italy's chain of institutes founded to write and analyse its history did discuss aspects of the RSI. However, they tended to minimise the role of the *Repubblica sociale italiana* because it was believed that it was not an autonomous force. For example, the author of the first important history of the Resistance, Roberto Battaglia, briefly mentions the *Repubblica sociale italiana* in his work and likens it to all other puppet regimes which the Nazis created during the Second World War. The reason for the reluctance of many Resistance historians to address the question is undoubtedly, as Luigi Ganapini has argued, because they felt that discussing the RSI would serve to



legitimise Italian quislings.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1977 that the first well-researched book on the RSI appeared. Its author, the journalist Giorgio Bocca, who had himself been a prominent partisan in the Resistance, was heavily criticised at the time by ex-partisans because he had personally collected the oral testimonies of several notorious Republicans.<sup>6</sup> The domestic climate in Italy in the late 1970s meant that Resistance historiography was extremely politicised and that certain arguments were still seen as politically unacceptable.

In the mid-1980s, however, the field became more open and some more sophisticated interpretations of the period appeared, notably a series of essays published by the *Fondazione Micheletti* in Brescia. Much of the debate was generated by the growth of empirical evidence as RSI archives became available to the public for the first time. Historians who wrote about this were, in some cases, basing their work on hitherto unread documents conserved in the National State Archives (*Archivio Centrale dello Stato*) in Rome. An important milestone in this historiography was the publication in 1997 of the last volume of Renzo De Felice's enormous biography of Mussolini which caused considerable controversy and led to renewed interest in the RSI. De Felice's *revisionismo* consisted in the author's refusal to interpret the period 1943 to 1945 as the history of the Resistance, but rather as the history of the *Repubblica sociale italiana*. More recent historiography, such as the work of Ganapini and Gagliani has begun to recognise that both were important. Because the Resistance in Udine has been much studied by other historians, here I will focus particularly on the RSI during the German occupation.

#### THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF UDINE

Some historians have suggested that the German occupation of Udine was very different from that experienced in most of the rest of northern Italy because the border provinces were effectively annexed to the German Reich. In practical terms, however, the German army and SS wielded supreme authority in all the territories of the RSI whether there was a Gauleiter present or not. Some historians who have studied the German occupation in northeast Italy have argued that the Nazis administered this area directly in 1943-1945 as part of a wartime plan to incorporate former Habsburg provinces into the German Reich and transform Friuli and Venezia

Giulia into a model for the New European Order.<sup>7</sup> It is true that the province was different from other areas of Italy because it was on the Austrian border, and Eastern Friuli had been part of the Habsburg Empire before 1918 and Austrian Nazis were prominent in the German occupation of Udine.

However, the notion that the German occupation of northeast Italy effectively annexed Italian provinces has been made popular by the Resistance research institutes partly because it diminishes the importance of Mussolini's Social Republic, plays down the role of the Italian officials, and portrays the Resistance as a patriotic struggle against a foreign invader rather than a war fought between Italians. Early Resistance historiography blamed the Germans almost entirely for the violence and brutalities and thus sidestepped questions about national war-guilt in the years 1943-45. On the whole, Resistance historiography has tended to understate the importance of the RSI, and, in provinces under direct German administration, scholars have been much less interested in the role of Mussolini's Social Republic. As the example of Udine shows, however, this is a mistake. In fact, the RSI played a much more important role in this area than such accounts would have us believe, at least in the repression of the Resistance.

#### THE *PARTITO FASCISTA REPUBBLICANO* (PFR) OF UDINE

Once the town of Udine was effectively in German hands, some of Mussolini's supporters answered his call to reconstitute the local section of the Fascist Party to defend Italy's honour, and fight the traitors who had destroyed Fascism. On 14 September, a group of former Fascists in Udine established a section of the new *Partito Fascista Repubblicano* (PFR) and obtained control of *Il Popolo* which thereafter became a broadsheet for both RSI and Nazi propaganda. One of the founding members of the Udine PFR was Piero Pisenti,<sup>8</sup> a prominent local lawyer, who was soon to become Mussolini's Justice Minister in the RSI. The new leader (*Commissario Federale*) of the Republican Fascist Party was Mario Cabai, a high-ranking officer in the militia (*centurione della Milizia*), who had fought in previous Fascist wars, including the campaign in Ethiopia. Cabai had been in charge of the *Dopolavoro*, the Fascist after-work organisation dedicated to the improvement of the

workers' leisure time, and he had commanded the youth section of the local PNF (*Fascio Giovanile*).<sup>9</sup> He was, therefore, well known to local people.

According to their writings in *Il Popolo*, the Udine PFR considered themselves to be a revival of the dissolved PNF, and an elite movement of hard-core Republicans who were demanding revenge on those who had betrayed Fascism and had collaborated with the Badoglio government during the 'Forty-five Days'.<sup>10</sup> An important theme both in *Il Popolo*, and in various propaganda pamphlets which it cranked out, was the return to a fighting spirit (*ritornare al combattimento*). From the start, the public voice of Republican Fascism in Udine made clear in their propaganda leaflets that the last phase of the war was a conflict of armed doctrines and that blood would flow.<sup>11</sup>

However, in practice, local Republicans were unable to carry out such threats because the German authorities did not allow them a free hand. The Germans occupying Udine doubtless believed that, if revenge was going to manifest itself in executions, lynching, and public humiliation, then the PFR would merely foment resistance to the occupation. A local PFR memorandum from 1 December 1943 shows that the German authorities were against the idea of a wholesale purge by the PFR. They undermined the authority of the new party by appointing civic officials who were not PFR members and who ultimately owed their allegiance to the SS Police rather than the RSI. On 25 October 1943, for example, Mussolini nominated Giovanni Mosconi as the RSI Prefect of Udine. At this point, *Il Popolo* suggested that Mosconi, a former *squadrista* who had briefly been Prefect from 10 June to 30 July 1943 before he was removed by Badoglio (due to his Fascist past), would himself purge the town's administration of non-Fascists.<sup>12</sup> In a speech published in *Il Popolo*, Mosconi assured readers that he wanted not only to rekindle the Fascist revolution, but also to re-establish the Italian army and continue the war alongside the Germans. The path to victory, he insisted, lay in a purge of local government officials who had supported Badoglio, and in the reconstruction of an independent Italian war effort.<sup>13</sup>

The Germans, however, had quite different plans: their priority was effective and orderly government in Udine. The German Gauleiter, Friedrich Rainer, refused to employ the Prefect selected by the RSI, and chose instead, Riccardo De Beden,

who had formerly been an official in the Habsburg Empire. Fluent in German, and with long experience as a *Primo Consigliere* in the Udine Prefettura, De Beden was over seventy when he became Prefect on 17 November 1943. Unlike Mosconi, De Beden, in his inaugural speech, emphasized collaboration with the German war effort and pacification of the home front. Indeed, in a veiled reference to the PFR, he made clear that he would suppress rebellious movements that threatened public order. Significantly, he talked about working exclusively with the German armed forces and never mentioned the *Governo Fascista Repubblicano*, still less the possibility of a new Italian army in the province.<sup>14</sup>

De Beden was thus only nominally an RSI Prefect. Indeed, an important RSI official, Giovanni Dolfin, wrote in his memoirs, *Con Mussolini nella tragedia*, that De Beden's correspondence with the RSI was formal and disinterested.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Udine's Republicans described De Beden as being weak (*una nullità*), and in the hands of the Germans (*nelle mani dei Tedeschi*) and, with only some exaggeration, anti-Italian and anti-Fascist.<sup>16</sup> What is clear is that the Germans had appointed a prefect who did not support, and had little support from, the local Republican Fascist Party.

Similarly, the RSI nominated a Republican Questore on 11 November 1943, but the German Gauleiter ignored this and instead appointed his own Chief of Police. He chose Luigi Cosenza, the very Questore who had persecuted Fascists, including Piero Pisenti, after the fall of Mussolini in July 1943. Cosenza was a non-Fascist Questore in the sense that he opposed the PFR and the RSI, and like De Beden, he effectively transferred his allegiance to the Nazis. Documents from the PFR archive describe similar nominations in other cities occupied by the German army. From the start, the Udine PFR was unable to exercise much influence on or through the important figures of the Prefect and the Questore. It was the customary procedure to appoint military and civil commanders who ruled through the existing civil service and Udine was no exception. This was obviously an avenue to direct German control of the Italian police services. By November 1943, the SS Police were in control of administration of Udine and consequently RSI officials had much less power in the Zone of Operations. It is clear that in Udine the German authorities did not want the RSI to become a rallying point for reactionary groups and refused to support the



organisation probably because the Nazis knew it would ultimately foment social turmoil and divide society.

Despite this, the Udine *Partito Fascista Repubblicano* was soon involved in suppressing the Resistance. On 25 November 1943, anti-Fascists established a local section of the Committee for National Liberation (CLN) and communists began to organise urban guerrilla groups (*Gruppi d'azione patriottica* or GAP) in several districts at about this time. The local Resistance movement not only aimed to liberate the province from German occupation, but also to prevent the RSI from uniting Italians under a new government in the north after the events of 8 September. Moreover, local PFR reports to the German authorities, and to Mussolini, make clear that the Republican Party in Udine soon became heavily involved in anti-partisan operations, especially as informants and spies for the SS.<sup>17</sup>

The Germans realised that if RSI officials (rather than non-Fascist *badogliani* officials) were prominent in the administration, then it would only serve to strengthen the Resistance. By 1944, Germany needed to drain the resources of its occupied territories in order to achieve victory which meant the SS had to draft as many Italians as possible into the Todt organisation to work for the German war effort. Colonel Ermacora Zuliani, who commanded the Alpini-Tagliamento Regiment in Udine, claimed in the regimental diary that the SS wanted the pacification of the Resistance rather than a draft for the Republican army. Although SS propaganda tried to convince men to abandon the Resistance it did not suggest that they should enlist in the newly formed Republican army.<sup>18</sup>

The local population, the Nazis believed, would be more divided and less useful to the German war effort if the Fascist party was permitted to regain its former power and take revenge on those who had collaborated with the Badoglio government. To some extent, this view was shared by some officials of the RSI. In particular, Piero Pisenti, one of the founders of the PRF in Udine, nevertheless recognised that the party, whose aim was to purge non-Fascists, would ultimately divide Italians at a time when the RSI government was supposed to be strengthening the Italian identity (*italianità*) of the regions now under direct German control. This explains why there was no purge of officials who had been appointed by Badoglio despite recommendations from Mario Cabai to remove them. According to a report



of mid-October 1943, important officials in the RSI were remarkably tolerant towards non-Fascists in local government, an ambivalent attitude which infuriated many local PFR members.<sup>19</sup>

In many ways, events in this period suggest that RSI officials in Salò were not particularly interested in the Udine PFR. It is significant that the PFR stopped recruiting members on 15 November, only a month after a local section of party was established. This meant that the number of PFR members in Udine was remarkably small compared to the numbers that had previously joined the Fascist Party. For instance, on 20 December 1943, the Udine PFR had a mere 5,100 members in 56 *comuni*, whereas at the beginning of the war, the PNF had had more than 127,000 members in 173 *comuni*.

Evidence from Udine shows, moreover, that the RSI had particularly few supporters in rural areas and that RSI Podestàs were unable to keep public order.<sup>20</sup> In a report to Mussolini, the PFR's local *Commissario*, Mario Cabai, said that, after a purge of Fascists in July 1943, most officials appointed by the Badoglio government remained in office during the German occupation. In the same report, Cabai insisted on an immediate purge of army officers who had not joined the PFR. An unsigned PFR memorandum dated 1 December 1943 states bluntly that the RSI government was supposed to purge the directors of many institutions, including the Italian Red Cross and the Veterans' Association, of *badogliani*, and replace them with PFR cadres.<sup>21</sup> Again, however, in practice, nothing was done to weed out non-Fascists from the state bureaucracies and institutions in the province.

#### THE RSI ALPINI-TAGLIAMENTO REGIMENT

At the same time that the PFR was established, the dissolved Fascist militia (MSVN) was reconstituted in a new guise as the Republican army (*Esercito repubblicano*). On 22 September, a new regiment, the Alpini-Tagliamento, was established for anti-partisan warfare. It is worthwhile looking at this military organisation as it had an important role in the period of the German occupation of the province. According to one former army officer who joined the regiment, it was a rallying point for Republicans and former Fascists who had fled north from southern Italy.<sup>22</sup>

On 21 September the commander of the Alpini-Tagliamento regiment, Ermacora Zuliani, issued a draft of young men for the new organisation that was to be the army of the Italian Social Republic. According to the diaries of the Alpini-Tagliamento regiment, which have survived the war, few regular army officers responded to their call-up papers, and consequently officers from the town's dissolved Militia formed the regiment's leadership corps. By contrast, the non-commissioned officers in the regiment came mostly from the infantry ranks of the army, although others who joined had served in the navy and the air force.<sup>23</sup> The majority of those who responded to the local draft and joined the regiment were young men, but older volunteers joined them too, men who had not been conscripted but wanted to enlist. This suggests that propaganda could be effective, especially in terms of attracting men with the incentive of regular wages and food.

Diary entries about recruitment suggest that the rank-and-file came mainly from the urban working-class. Few middle class men were drafted because state employees, medical students and final year students were all exempted from military service.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that, in the case of Udine at least, the RSI army was not a rallying point for the middle classes.

The results of the first recruitment campaign were so poor that the RSI organised another draft on 4 November of even younger men, those born in 1924. To increase the numbers coming forward, Republican army officers delivered the call-up papers to *comuni* in person, rather than rely on the dubious postal service.

That same month, however, Friedrich Rainer annulled the Italian draft and issued a German draft for labour of those born in 1923, 1924, and 1925. Without consulting the Italian commanders, Rainer informed the local population that military service in the Republican army was purely voluntary, not obligatory.<sup>25</sup> No doubt the Germans realised that the RSI army was very unpopular and that young men were more likely to join the Resistance when faced with the RSI call-up. According to its diaries, this was a devastating blow to the credibility and prestige of the Alpini-Tagliamento regiment as the organisation was now powerless to conscript local men into its ranks. The clear message from the German authorities was that the reconstruction of the Italian army in the province was unimportant to the course of the war. This suggested to the local population that the Germans did not want to rely

on Italian soldiers. It also undermined RSI propaganda which emphasised the importance of reconstructing the Italian army, and which repeated *ad nauseum* how crucial it was for young men to return to combat following the events of 8 September, so that Italy's war could be salvaged, and won. After the German ban on conscription, one Republican army officer's diary entry summed up the dismay of the regiment by commenting 'What is the point of army Headquarters?' The result was that no more young men with draft papers arrived at the Alpini-Tagliamento Regiment barracks in Udine, and recruitment ground to a halt within days of Rainer's proclamation. Only a small number of conscripts decided to remain. The rest were immediately demobilised.<sup>26</sup> The German draft further undermined morale in the Alpini-Tagliamento regiment by creating chaos among soldiers who had been drafted into the army, but who now refused to serve as volunteers after hearing about the German proclamation.<sup>27</sup>

On November 19, Globocnik took over command of the regiment and told the commander Zuliani to change the regiment's name to the Reggimento Volontari Friulani Tagliamento.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Zuliani exchanged the soldiers' militia insignias (*fascetti littori*) for army stars, and began to take orders from the German army, rather than the RSI Militia chiefs.<sup>29</sup> In fact, when Rudolfo Graziani visited the barracks on 16 March 1944, he found that the regiment was at the service of the Nazis, and even he had to obtain permission from the SS Police to inspect his own troops.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, Graziani managed to visit the troops for two hours, but the SS Commander in Udine, Von Feil, did not even bother to show up to meet him.<sup>31</sup> The Italian Commander noted in the regimental diary that the local population interpreted this change of leadership as a sign that the regiment had distanced itself from Mussolini's Social Republic.<sup>32</sup> In fact the regiment now owed allegiance to the SS.

On 24 July, the SS arrested all the policemen in the Questura Repubblicana and, although the majority were released from the town jail several hours later, the Nazis dismissed the Questore Luigi Cosenza and other officials, who were later deported to concentration camps in Germany. The official reason for the purge was that the Questore had established contact with Communist Resistance forces without informing the SS. At about this time the SS disarmed the carabinieri and arrested a few prominent former army commanders.<sup>33</sup> The SS significantly reduced the

numbers of Italian officials and curbed their power.<sup>34</sup> Cosenza, for example, was replaced by the Questore of Gorizia, a notorious Republican, who was clearly working for the German police.

Various important figures in the RSI later tried to justify their actions. An account by the RSI ambassador in Berlin, Filippo Anfuso, published in 1950, for example, claimed that Mussolini's regime provided northern Italy with some sort of governance and ensured that important state institutions, for example the judiciary and the police, were not dismantled by the Nazis, but continued to function throughout the last phase of the war.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein, the RSI Justice Minister, Piero Pisenti, argued that Mussolini's Social Republic was what he called 'a necessary republic' (*Repubblica necessaria*) whose role was to forestall German reprisals after the events of 8 September 1943. Evidence from Udine, however, suggests that the Nazis had no real difficulty dismantling the important state institutions despite, or because of, the presence of the *Repubblica sociale italiana*. In reality it seems that officials of the RSI were either unable or unwilling to shield fellow Italians from the brutalities of German occupation. Indeed, this situation led the Prefect of Trieste, in December 1944, to question whether there was any point, at all, in having RSI prefects.<sup>36</sup>

Nor were RSI soldiers able to police the province. Diary entries suggest that the Alpini-Tagliamento regiment was not effective in keeping public order in the town of Udine. The regiment was supposed to police the town and enforce SS proclamations. Some soldiers guarded the *ammassi* depots to prevent looting as a result of food shortages, whilst others guarded the Republican Fascist Party offices.<sup>37</sup> Republicans, as town guards, however, had a heavy-handed approach to policing. For example, when the Germans ordered them to curb prostitution, soldiers from the regiment promptly arrested eighty women who were walking the streets, bundled them into lorries, and interrogated them at the barracks before accompanying them to the hospital for medical inspections. There it was discovered that none of the women had venereal disease and some were, in fact, virgins. Incidents like this brought enormous discredit on the Republicans as a police force.<sup>38</sup>

Udine's Republicans were increasingly involved in more sinister forms of collaboration with the German authorities. The militia rounded up workers who had

deserted the Todt Organisation. It also arrested Jews and Resistance activists and deported them to German death camps, usually after a brief interrogation by SS police that often resulted in the individual being found guilty without a trial or witnesses.<sup>39</sup>

#### REPUBLICAN VIOLENCE: THE *RASTRELLAMENTI*

The most notorious episodes of Republican violence, however, took place in rural not urban areas. The *rastrellamenti* were brutally heavy-handed, anti-partisan operations organised by the Republicans and Nazis which led to mass deportation and slaughter in unthreatening rural communities. The true extent of Republican violence that occurred as a result of rearguard actions will never be known for, as contemporary Questura memorandums make clear, most crimes of rape, theft, and arson went unreported for fear of further reprisals against victims or their communities.<sup>40</sup> That said, post-war testimonies at collaborators' trials do shed light on at least some of the violence perpetrated by Italians against Italians in Udine.

Why did Italians become involved in *rastrellamenti*? One reason was that, according to the PFR in Udine, the German army was remarkably thin on the ground in the province, and occupying troops were not necessarily available to be deployed for anti-partisan warfare.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, RSI sources maintained that the SS Police were present only in urban areas not rural communities and, to enforce German war regulations in the countryside, the SS carried out brutal reprisals which involved mass arrests and deportations.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, reports from the Republican Fascist Party and the Questore suggest that the SS Police did not have sufficient forces to combat the growing Resistance movement and increasingly relied on Italian units for military operations in Friuli. In this way, the Resistance was prevented from tying down large numbers of German soldiers in rearguard actions, and it meant that Italians were fighting Italians in a conflict that resembled civil war.

Spring 1944 marked a new and terrible phase in the ideological struggle between Republicans and partisans. During this period, Resistance activities broadened and intensified, and violence became literally an everyday experience in Friuli. The number of fighting partisans was relatively small during the winter of 1943-44, but, by March, there were three non-communist Osoppo Brigades and a



Garibaldi Friuli Division in the mountains north of the provincial capital which were able to mount offensives against the Germans. The territory which was free from Resistance attacks continued to shrink and even Republicans in Udine were no longer safe from partisan reprisals. Writing to his mother in Forlì, Romagna, one Republican summed up the attitudes of Udine's inhabitants in early March:

The local people really hate us because they say we are volunteers, and the military authorities don't even let us out of the barracks because partisans are always in town. It is dreadful to be in the army without ever leaving the barracks, and I was shocked and disappointed when I learned about the Resistance movement.<sup>43</sup>

Mario Cabai, the local PFR *Federale*, not only asked the SS Police to let the party have an important role in reprisals which the SS unleashed on the civilian population, but asked the Germans to mount even more violent attacks in rural areas. A report to Mussolini from Ettore Della Pietra, the leading RSI authority in Udine, said that Cabai had often suggested combined operations of SS and Republican forces against rural communities.<sup>44</sup> Another notorious PFR activist, Gino Covre, who had been a violent *squadrista* in the early days of Fascism, complained that the Germans did not accept the Udine PFR's offers to attack communists, and begged Giovanni Dolfi, Mussolini's secretary at Salò, to provide Udine's Republicans with weapons to combat the local population's indifference and resistance.<sup>45</sup>

De Felice has suggested that Mussolini was out of touch and that widespread war weariness meant the vast majority of Italians sided with neither the Resistance or Salò. In De Felice's opinion, many civilians failed to support the RSI because they felt Fascism was ultimately responsible for 8 September.<sup>46</sup> The case of Udine, however, shows that, as the Republican Questore admitted in one of his reports to Mussolini in April 1944, the local population associated the Udine PFR with turmoil, social conflict, criminality and a propensity towards violence and this was one of the reasons why people failed to join its ranks or offer support.<sup>47</sup>

For example, in June 1944, the PFR in Udine decided to try to become an armed party and a militarised force. Gino Covre sent out call up papers to all Republicans who were to come to the PFR offices on 6 June 1944 to join a new armed battalion. According to the head of the RSI in the province (*Capo della Provincia*), Ettore Della Pietra, the PFR believed that the German police were not repressive enough, and failed to understand the true scale of the Resistance

movement.<sup>48</sup> On 3 June 1944, at a meeting in the Europa Hotel, a *squadrista*, Chiesa, promised a crowd of Republicans that local PFR members would arm themselves with truncheons and terrorize people into supporting the organisation.<sup>49</sup> On 25 June the national PFR Secretary, Pavolini, sent orders to the various sections to transform the party into an armed party.<sup>50</sup> With all the talk of violence, it is not difficult to see why the party was not popular with local people in Udine.

One reason for the Republican calls for political violence was the total frustration within the ranks of the Udine PFR. Rumours that the province of Udine would return to Italian administration in May had failed to materialise and the SS never allowed the party much room for manoeuvre. In addition, by mid-1944, a number of PFR members had been murdered by partisans, and some Republicans wanted to arm themselves and avenge the killings.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, RSI garrisons in rural areas were being attacked by large numbers of partisans who often managed to overthrow the Republicans. In one typical episode on 12 July about two hundred Resistance activists overwhelmed a garrison of seventeen soldiers near the town of Udine. The report went on to describe with surprise how one of the 'bandits' was a young dark-haired woman in army uniform.<sup>52</sup>

The head of the RSI in Udine (*Capo della Provincia*) Ettore Della Pietra, described to Mussolini how the violence had recently intensified and that

the number of Republicans kidnapped or killed by partisans has increased alarmingly, as has the number of villages burned down by the Germans, who intervene but their actions are often heavy-handed: they carry out mass arrests of suspects including Republicans, and destroy the houses of people who have nothing to do with the partisans.<sup>53</sup>

Partisans were increasingly attacking individual Republicans. For example, the leader of the Republican Fascist Party in the village of Buia, north of Udine, was killed by partisans who blew up his house with a large landmine.<sup>54</sup> PFR reports show that Republicans were shocked at the scale and commitment of the Resistance in Udine.

Nonetheless, Republicans proved themselves to be willing collaborators during *rastrellamenti* and I have found no evidence to suggest that Italians were any less barbaric than their German counterparts during operations against rural communities. On the contrary, witnesses at collaborators' trials in the immediate

aftermath of the war claimed that Republicans were even more aggressive than the SS. Claudio Pavone has put forward an interesting explanation for this. It may be that, as he argues, the Republicans were particularly violent due to their fear of not being taken seriously.<sup>55</sup>

Admittedly, it could be argued that sometimes Republicans were commanded by SS officers and were therefore simply following orders. It should be remembered, however, that Republicans who took part in anti-partisan operations were not conscripts but volunteers, usually commanded by Italian, not German, officers. Also Italians who took part in Nazi operations saved the SS from having to use German soldiers who were much needed as frontline troops. Nor does fear or adrenalin in the heat of battle explain the barbarity since much of the violence took place at the regimental barracks in specially equipped rooms that were veritable 'torture chambers.' Here civilians were suspended from meat hooks, bludgeoned, whipped and drenched with boiling or freezing water. Most were tortured so that they would name names and denounce fellow villagers<sup>56</sup> but others were beaten without even any pretence of questioning. On one occasion, an SS officer had to prevent a Republican soldier from stabbing an individual to death in the town jail before interrogation had begun.

When suspected Resistance activists were arrested in the *rastrellamenti*, interrogations always involved grisly torture at the Republican barracks. One partisan, Ottavio Villa, testified that Republican soldiers took him to a special room, stripped him, and beat him for more than three hours.<sup>57</sup> Such beatings were sometimes so disfiguring that when the victims returned to their cells they were unrecognisable to fellow prisoners.

One ferocious Republican, Odorico Borsatti, prepared a torture chamber with various instruments at the barracks in Palmanova, occupied by a section of the regiment in Udine. In this room, Republicans suspended prisoners from meat hooks for four or five days. Other prisoners were stripped, beaten and put in a cell whose floor was covered with water and quicklime to increase the suffering. Many victims died of their injuries and were buried under the floorboards, in the courtyard or in some other part of the barracks.<sup>58</sup> One suspected partisan suffered a horrific death: Republicans tied him with long ropes to two horses which were then made to bolt in

opposite directions. Other Republicans gagged and tortured prisoners inside a tank so that their screams could not be heard in the street outside. Many partisans had teeth broken with rifle butts, or ears cut off with bayonets during interrogations, and many had to be propped up against the walls of the cells because they could no longer stand on their feet. After the war, judges at Republicans' trials compared the violence to the worst barbarity of the Middle Ages. During trials, judges were shocked to learn that fellow nationals were capable of brutalities normally associated with the SS. One asked for example: 'How is it that an Italian from Pola, a truly Italian city, is capable of such crimes?'<sup>59</sup>

Nor does there seem to have been an aura of shame about crimes carried out during the *rastrellamenti*. Evidence from Udine shows that Republican perpetrators of gratuitous violence frequently boasted about their barbaric acts. In a letter to his sister-in-law, a soldier who had taken part in the interrogation and killing of a partisan described how he had kicked the corpse.<sup>60</sup> Another Republican wrote that during one of the *rastrellamenti*, he had beaten a badly wounded civilian to death with a stone after he and other members of the firing squad had failed to execute the prisoner.<sup>61</sup>

Not all *rastrellamenti* were true anti-partisan operations, or even an exaggerated deterrent for rural communities that favoured the Resistance. Evidence presented at collaborators' trials makes clear that some of the *rastrellamenti* took place in areas where there were no partisans, and where there had been no police reports of Resistance activity for months. Furthermore, Italian officers frequently organised a *rastrellamento* without knowing exactly why they had been sent to that particular area, and were often only given this information by the SS Police after the violence and destruction had taken place.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that the violence was often indiscriminate and the destruction random. In fact *rastrellamenti* frequently took place because Republican soldiers, who were unable to find partisans in the countryside, vented their anger and frustration on rural communities.

Republicans did not distance themselves from German terror as the violence escalated. On the contrary, the head of the local RSI, Ettore Della Pietra, suggested to Mussolini, in mid-June 1944, that Udine's Republican forces should completely assimilate the SS.<sup>63</sup> Nor does Fascist indoctrination fully explain the violence. Trial



evidence shows that some perpetrators of violence had no Fascist past at all. One Republican, Bruno Zatti, who was so ferocious that he earned the admiration of the SS, had never been a member of the Fascist Party nor had he ever lived in Italy during the Fascist period. His family had lived for years in the United States and he had only returned to Italy in 1940 when war broke out in Europe.<sup>64</sup>

Many Italians who took part in the *rastrellamenti* were very young, teenagers in fact. As part of the RSI recruitment campaign, *Il Popolo* printed up some 1,000 posters and 5,000 leaflets in town and as a result small groups of boys presented themselves at the barracks each day. The young men could choose whether to join the Todt organisation, the Republican army or the German SS formations, or the Black Shirt Brigades, and recruitment boards comprised officers from the various services, carefully chosen for their appeal to the young. Whether destined for the SS, or the RSI armed forces, all young men entered the services first by going to barracks of the Republican army.<sup>65</sup>

Edmondo Bernucci, for example, was just sixteen when he joined the *Battaglione fascisti friulani* in the town of Udine and took part in anti-partisan operations in rural areas.<sup>66</sup> Another young man, Martino De Bello, was fifteen when he joined the Republican armed forces and, by the age of sixteen, was already directly responsible for the arrest and deportation of several people. Boys like De Bello, who guarded columns of civilians as they were loaded onto railway wagons at the station and deported to death camps, did not simply passively guard deportees, but intimidated them and threatened to kill those who attempted escape.<sup>67</sup> Once Udine became the target of air attacks, and the war situation on the battlefield rapidly deteriorated, the recruitment campaign had to search further afield for new recruits and as a result of increased propaganda in the mountain regions of Friuli, more volunteers joined the Fascist battalion in early 1944, especially in areas remote from the town, where there was a greater tradition of Alpine infantry regiments.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, anti-partisan operations were often conducted by young men who were themselves from rural communities.

It is worth describing a typical *rastrellamento* which took place in the village of Osoppo. The community had been an important military base for the Italian army before the armistice, and villagers had lived peacefully alongside soldiers during the



war. On 1 December 1944, however, Republicans and Germans surrounded the small town and mined all the exits with explosives. Most villagers fled to the air raid shelters, and Republicans ransacked their houses for valuables and other items. On this occasion, one hundred and fifty villagers, including children, were taken to Udine town jail and later deported to Dachau and other death camps.<sup>69</sup> On such occasions, heavily pregnant women and young girls were raped during the *rastrellamenti*.

Foreign labour was vital to the German war effort and so *rastrellamenti* were often rural manhunts for pressing villagers into service with the *Todt* Organisation.<sup>70</sup> During one *rastrellamento*, a Republican, Giorgio Vucovich, rounded up boys in Tolmezzo for the auxiliary service of the German air force and loaded them onto a lorry which departed for Udine. The boys were so young, however, that those who did not manage to escape during the journey were returned by the Germans to their families after a few days.<sup>71</sup> *Rastrellamenti* were also important occasions to find female labour. Evidence shows that Republicans rounded up girls and young women for service in the *Todt* Organisation.<sup>72</sup> Himmler had emphasised in 1944 that if anti-tank ditches were not dug, then German soldiers would die. Therefore Republicans had an important role in providing the *Todt* Organisation with forced labour, where employment regulations were nonexistent for Italians. A report from Tarvisio near the Austrian border describes a typical example of forced labour in November 1944:

The call-up was carried out by a council worker and women were conscripted without the signature of the Podestà. When the Podestà queried the regulations he was told that all the local women had to turn up whether married or not. In practice, a few women with small children were exempted by the council official, but in a wholly arbitrary manner. On 28 November, of the one hundred women conscripted, only sixteen departed for the labour service. Conditions and hygiene were not worthy of a civilised nation: the women's accommodation was an unheated, wooden hut with damp straw for bedding. The communal latrines were far away and were simply holes dug in the earth. The women worked nine hours with one short break to consume the appalling food rations. During the night, the women were constantly harassed by male workers and soldiers, who forced their way into the huts.

The women viewed labour service as a form of deportation. One sixteen year old girl, who had volunteered to take her mother's place, broke her leg and was left in a hut for two days without being taken to hospital or sent home.<sup>73</sup>

Women and children were a cheap labour source and therefore, during *rastrellamenti*, there was the unpredictable threat of being rounded up and sent to dig anti-tank ditches or to work in Germany.

Early accounts of the RSI—diaries and memoirs of prominent Fascists—tended to try to defend what they had done. One very prominent Republican, Rudolfo Graziani, who had been commander of the RSI army, published his memoirs in 1950. According to his version of events, Italians who fought for the *Repubblica sociale italiana* were patriots who preferred to remain with Mussolini to the bitter end rather than take sides with the Allies or the Communists. Furthermore, Graziani presented Republican soldiers as defenders of the Italian identity (*italianità*) of border regions that had been won with considerable sacrifice during the First World War. The case of Udine, however, demonstrates that the *rastrellamenti* carried out by RSI soldiers were far from patriotic actions because they were military operations against fellow nationals which resulted in slaughter, deportation and forced labour.

As Allied air raids intensified, the PFR was increasingly involved in welfare work, especially in the aftermath of aerial attacks. Republican *Fasci femminili*, who visited soldiers' dependants and refugee families, were something like town social workers, and among other things, the party sought accommodation for evacuee families who had fled from the bombed cities or the Allied armies. They turned to the party for help in finding a house, or job. It demonstrates that the party did have the political clout to cut through bureaucracy and acquire funds from the RSI Interior Ministry. But in Udine at least, the PFR mainly only assisted its own people—Republicans working directly for the SS or important officials for the German war effort.

There was a special reason to provide assistance in 1943. With the Allied advance steadily pushing back Republicans in Central Italy, there were many Republicans who chose to continue the Italian war effort in Udine rather than surrender to the British or Americans. Many fled with an entourage—children,

elderly parents—and it was they who needed housing. Letters from the PFR on behalf of people asking for help, show that the party was often assisting so-called war refugees who were former Fascists or Republicans from other parts of Italy or from Italian colonies or other invaded territories. Most Fascists who were fleeing north from the Allied advance brought their families with them. Some families asked for assistance in Udine because they had become cut off from male relatives in southern Italy or abroad but it is important to note that people were assisted primarily because they were working for the RSI or the SS.

In April and May most refugees were from Sicily and southern Italy. A typical case was that of the Fraioli family. Carlo Fraioli, a Fascist, had left Rome with his wife, four children, including a newly born baby, and his elderly parents on 20 May and arrived in Udine on the evening of 3 June. After staying in a local hotel for four months the family was still unable to find accommodation and turned to the Republican Fascist Party for help.<sup>74</sup> The problem was that accommodation, particularly large, middle class apartments, was almost impossible to find in Udine. By February 1944, the SS had requisitioned two hundred and fifty flats in Udine including whole sections of streets. The SS commander justified this inconvenience to the local population by saying that if Italy had not betrayed Germany then the SS would not be in town at all. Another important group of people who asked for Republican Party assistance was the growing number of army officers and RSI officials who were vulnerable to partisan attacks. In a sense they were RSI refugees from Udine's rural areas which were now controlled by the Resistance. At the beginning of November 1944, the council housing department was inundated with requests from RSI personnel who wanted to move to the town for safety.

Through its welfare role, the PFR did at least try to convey the image of benevolent organisation but, in practice, in towns too, its main activities were far more violent. RSI officials and PFR members were involved in some of the most sinister aspects of German occupation of urban areas. For example, Republican officers actively collaborated in hunting down Jews who had gone into hiding, and the Republican secret police service, the *Ufficio Politico Investigativo* (UPO), were the eyes and ears of the SS. UPO had particular functions which included marshalling or fabricating incriminating evidence that Jews or Resistance activists

were carrying out subversive activities. For example, according to the Fascists, a Jewish schoolteacher, Renata Steccati, had asked her pupils if there were German troops, ammunition dumps, or air fields near their houses so that she could pass this information on to the partisans.<sup>75</sup> Republicans managed to get people dismissed from jobs—and deported to Nazi Germany—by reporting them as anti-Fascists. For example, one Republican, Luciano Tita, a schoolteacher who incited boys to join the RSI armed forces, denounced council workers in Gemonia, near Udine, and replaced them with Republican Party members.<sup>76</sup>

On 20 September 1944, Globocnik conscripted the council police officers (*vigili urbani*) into the SS police services (*Schutzpolizei*). The Podestà was never consulted and only learned about the order on 27 September. Globocnik believed ‘that Italian policeman should either be on the beat or dismissed from their posts’, which meant that the SS got rid of police chiefs and clerical staff. In reality, *vigili urbani* had been working for the SS since the town had been occupied. In fact some policemen guarded SS telephone lines while two policemen were employed by the SD to find accommodation and food for German officers passing through Udine. Therefore council police collaborated with the German administration. From September, however, the role of *vigili urbani* changed. They no longer had ordinary police duties such as patrolling the market squares and gardens, checking lighting, traffic and public buildings. Council records show that the police force was very small: at any one time only ten officers watched over the thoroughfares including the central square, Piazza Contarena, while ten others patrolled the outskirts of the town.<sup>77</sup>

Evidence from Udine, then, demonstrates that Italians, too, were capable of horrendous brutality during the war, often against people from their own communities. De Felice’s version of events has papered over the sinister aspects of the regime, notably the massacre of Italians, the deportation of Jews from RSI provinces, and support for the German war effort.

It is wrong, of course, to be selective of trial evidence in order to make sweeping statements about all Italians who served in the RSI armed forces. In fact testimonies at collaborators’ trials also describe how many individuals were forced to participate in the extraordinary brutality and how some had been arrested by the SS

Police chose military service with Republican forces rather than suffer deportation. Others, particularly men from the urban proletariat with families to support, joined the Republican army because the SS did not send Italian regiments to the battlefield.

To conclude, evidence from Republican Party reports suggests that the Germans were relatively thin on the ground in Udine, fewer than people popularly imagine. Military occupation really amounted to little more than the control of the province by SS police services. The Germans were particularly weak in rural areas and this explains the important role of the RSI armed forces. In the *rastrellamenti*, Italians proved themselves willing collaborators and so during the occupation the Germans did not have a monopoly on violence and brutality. More evidence is needed from other regions, but trial reports from Udine do suggest that Italians were perpetrators of horrific crimes too, and in many ways the brutality was more shocking because it was against fellow nationals and sometimes even fellow villagers, people from the same small community. Ideology alone cannot explain the violence because, as trial evidence proves, some perpetrators had not been prominent Fascists before the Resistance period. Of course, trial evidence has to be used with caution, especially when attempting to draw conclusions about the general attitudes and behaviour of all Italians who took part in anti-partisan operations. However, the violence recorded in trials may be no more than the tip of the iceberg. Judges themselves admitted that the evidence before courts was not the whole picture. Much of the worst violence had no witnesses and did not form part of post-war testimonies. The true extent of violence perpetrated by Italians will doubtless never be known.

The evidence I have collected for Udine does suggest that that the RSI did have an important role during the German occupation in the years 1943 to 1945, albeit with limited room for manoeuvre. Admittedly, the SS were often the organisers of the violence, but the fact that the Germans were so few in number meant that many Italians carried out some of the worst atrocities. In short, much of the brutality of the occupation was the work of Italians. Indeed, their involvement was integral to German occupation. Responsibility for war-related crimes went far beyond the ranks of the SS.



## Endnotes to Chapter Six

- <sup>1</sup> F.W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship. Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Fascism* (London: Phoenix Press, 1962), 614.
- <sup>2</sup> Giannino Angeli, *La guerra vista dai padri* (Pasian di Prato: Comune di Tavagnacco, 1999), 94.
- <sup>3</sup> Giampaolo Gallo, *La Resistenza in Friuli 1943-1945* (Udine: IFSML, 1988), 55.
- <sup>4</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. II. La guerra civile 1943-1945* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 343.
- <sup>5</sup> Ganapini, *Una città, la guerra (Milano 1939-1951)*, 99-100.
- <sup>6</sup> Giorgio Bocca, *La Repubblica di Mussolini* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore), 7.
- <sup>7</sup> On this see for example Enzo Collotti, *Dizionario della Resistenza. 1. Storia e geografia della Liberazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000), 60-61.
- <sup>8</sup> Piero Pisenti (1887-1980), a lawyer, founded the Partito del lavoro and later joined the Fascist movement. He was director of the broadsheets *Il Giornale di Udine* and *Il Giornale del Friuli*. In 1923 he became Prefect of the new Fascist province of Udine which included Gorizia. From December 1943 to the Liberation he was the Justice Minister of the Repubblica sociale italiana.
- <sup>9</sup> PFR Appunto per il Duce, 12 April 1944, Unsigned, but most probably written by Mario Cabai, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16 Udine.
- <sup>10</sup> The Forty-Five Days (*i quarantacinque giorni*) is the period from the collapse of the Fascist regime on 25 July 1943 to the announcement of the armistice on 8 September 1943. The Fascist Party organisations disintegrated after the fall of Mussolini's regime, and a military dictatorship, headed by Marshal Pietro Badoglio, governed Italy during this dramatic phase.
- <sup>11</sup> See for example the Fascist propaganda leaflets 'Volantini di propaganda nazi-fascista', IFSML, Fondo 6, RSI in Friuli, b.1, f.13.
- <sup>12</sup> 'La nomina di Giovanni Mosconi a Capo della provincia di Udine', *PdF*, 1 October, 1943.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Il saluto dell'Ecc. Mosconi alle autorità della provincia' *PdF*, 5 October 1943.
- <sup>14</sup> 'L'insediamento del nuovo prefetto per la provincia di Udine', *PdF*, 9 November 1943.
- <sup>15</sup> Giovanni Dolfi, *Con Mussolini nella tragedia. Diario del capo della segreteria particolare del Duce 1943-1944* (Milan: Garzanti, 1949), 134.
- <sup>16</sup> Pro-memoria relativo alla situazione della provincia di Udine, 1 December 1943, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16 Udine.
- <sup>17</sup> See for example, Partito Fascista Repubblicano, Federazione di Udine, Promemoria, Mario Cabai to Oberführer Feil of the German SS in Udine, 10 March, 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16 Udine.
- <sup>18</sup> Diario Storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento Sett. 1943-Aprile 1944. Entry for 9 January 1944, IFSML, Fondo 6, RSI in Friuli, b.3a.
- <sup>19</sup> Report from Udine, 17 October 1943, ACS, Fondo Piero Pisenti, b.3.
- <sup>20</sup> Out of 172 *comuni* in the province, only 56 had organised a PFR Fascio di Combattimento. See Report by Mario Cabai 'Il Partito Fascista Repubblicano, Provincia di Udine', ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16, Udine.
- <sup>21</sup> Pro-memoria relativo alla situazione della provincia di Udine, 1 December 1943, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16, Udine.
- <sup>22</sup> Sentence of Walter Pozzi, 28 February 1947, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise. Walter Bruno Pozzi, a former artillery officer in the Italian army, was the Commander of the *Battaglioni Fascisti friulani* and joined the MDT in 15 September 1944, after serving in the Republican air force.
- <sup>23</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI) Entry for 21 September, 1943, IFSML, Fondo 6, RSI, b.3b.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, 28 September, 1943.
- <sup>25</sup> Appunto per il Comandante Dott. Vittorio Mussolini, 24 November, 1943, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16, Udine.
- <sup>26</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI). See entries 4-10 November, 1943.
- <sup>27</sup> Appunto per il Comandante Dott. Vittorio Mussolini.
- <sup>28</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI) Entry for 28 September, 1943. Entry for 19 November 1943.
- <sup>29</sup> Pro-memoria relativo alla situazione della provincia di Udine, 1 December 1943. Unsigned, but probably written by Mario Cabai, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>30</sup> Verbale della riunione tenutasi all'ambasciata di Germania sabato 20 gennaio 1945, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.13.

- <sup>31</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI) Entry for 28 September, 1943, Entry for 16 March 1944.
- <sup>32</sup> Diario Storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento Sett. 1943-Aprile 1944, Entry for 31 March 1944.
- <sup>33</sup> Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana Ferroviaria Ispettorato. Report on the arrest of state policemen in the Questura, 9 August 1944, ACS, GNR, b.44.
- <sup>34</sup> Verbale della riunione tenutasi all'ambasciata di Germania sabato 20 gennaio 1945, ACS, SPD, CR, b.13.
- <sup>35</sup> See for example Dolfín, *Con Mussolini nella tragedia. Diario del capo della segreteria particolare del Duce 1943-1944*, Graziani, *Una Vita per Italia. 'Ho difeso la patria'* (Milan: Mursia, 1986).
- <sup>36</sup> Bruno Coceani, *Contributo alla Storia di Trieste durante l'occupazione tedesca. Il memoriale del 20 dicembre 1944* (Trieste: Tipografia Giuliana, 1963), 13-14.
- <sup>37</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI). Entry 23 September, 1943.
- <sup>38</sup> Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship*, 731.
- <sup>39</sup> See signed testimony of Veritti Fiorante, 14 November 1945, at appeal trial of Walter Pozzi in ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>40</sup> Questura Cosenza to Colonel Feil, SS Comander in Udine, 31 March 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16, Udine.
- <sup>41</sup> PFR Udine. Mario Cabai to Mussolini, Promemoria per il Duce, 18 September 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16, Udine.
- <sup>42</sup> Memorandum from Ettore Della Pietra to Mussolini, 13 June 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>43</sup> Letter from Gino Aviere Pompignoli Aeronautica Italiana, Battaglione Reclute 6<sup>a</sup> Compagnia, to his mother, 6 March 1944, ASU, Gab. Pref., b.39, f.119.
- <sup>44</sup> Memorandum from Ettore Della Pietra to Mussolini, 13 June 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>45</sup> PNF Udine, Gino Covre to Giovanni Dolfín, Segretario Particolare, 21 December, 1943, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16, Udine.
- <sup>46</sup> De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato. 2. La guerra civile 1943-1945*, 129.
- <sup>47</sup> Udine, Questore Report, 13 April 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>48</sup> Ettore Della Pietra to Mussolini, 13 June 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>49</sup> Questura report to German authorities, 4 July 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>50</sup> Dianella Gagliani, *Brigate nere* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), 108.
- <sup>51</sup> Questura report to German authorities, 31 March, 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>52</sup> Unsigned memorandum for Ricci and Mussolini, 27 July 1944, ACS, GNR, b.44.
- <sup>53</sup> Memorandum from Ettore Della Pietra to Mussolini, 13 June 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>54</sup> Mario Cabai to SS Oberfuhrer Von Feil, 19 March 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>55</sup> Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile: saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1996), 437.
- <sup>56</sup> Sentence of Giovanni Bortolin, 14 June 1945, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>57</sup> Testimony of Ottavio Villa at trial of Giuseppe Giardina, 27 May 1945, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>58</sup> Sentence of Odorico Borsatti, 5 May 1945, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>59</sup> See comments during the sentencing of Borsatti who was an Italian army officer from Pola. ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise, Sentence of Odorico Borsatti, 5 May 1945.
- <sup>60</sup> Sentence of Emilio Tosilini, 14 January 1946, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>61</sup> Sentence of Luigi Pittia, 29 July 1946, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>62</sup> Sentence of Walter Pozzi, 27 February, 1947, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>63</sup> Memorandum from Ettore Della Pietra to Mussolini, 13 June 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI). Entry 9 March, 1944.
- <sup>66</sup> Sentenza nel procedimento contro Edmondo Berucci, 7 July, 1945, ASU, Archivio della Corte Straordinaria d'Assise.
- <sup>67</sup> According to the testimony of Davide Castellan, one of the few prisoners who returned to Udine, at his trial, Martino De Bello also guarded the railway wagons which left Udine with about fifty 'political prisoners' bound for concentration camps. Sentence of Martino De Bello, 16 April 1946, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.

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- <sup>68</sup> Diario storico-militare Rgt. Alpini Tagliamento September 1943 to April 1944 (forze armate RSI). See for example, entries for 10 November, 1943 and 15 January 1944.
- <sup>69</sup> Sentence of Billi Pasutto, 4 December 1945, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>70</sup> Sentence of Alberto Micottis, 22 October, 1945, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>71</sup> Sentence of Giorgio Vucovich, 29 January 1946, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>72</sup> Sentence of Dante del Fabbro, 22 March 1946, ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise.
- <sup>73</sup> PFR Tarvisio to PFR Udine and SS Police, 30 November 1944, ACS, SPD, CR, RSI, b.13, f.16.
- <sup>74</sup> Letter from Vittoria Giordano, 28 September 1944, AMU, b. 233 Alloggi.
- <sup>75</sup> Il Console Generale, Capo del Servizio Politico, to Comando della 63 Legione GNR (UPI), 17 November, 1944, ACS, GNR, b.44.
- <sup>76</sup> Archivio della Corte d'Assise, File on Luciano Tita, who founded the Fascio Repubblicano of Gemona.
- <sup>77</sup> Schutzpolizeidienstabteilung to Prefect on transfer of Vigilanza Urbana to Schutzpolizei, 30 September 1944, AMU.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CIVIL AFFAIRS OFFICERS

Marxist historians have equated the Allied occupation of Italy with international capitalism and have attempted to relate AMG wartime policy to anti-Marxism and the ideological world of Cold War alignments. Early Resistance historiography suggested that Allied Military Government had a negative role in Italy in that occupation prevented the Resistance from achieving important wartime goals including radical changes to Italian politics and society. According to this version, the Allies, who did not share the socialist values of the Resistance, obstructed a purge of Fascists and Republicans, and prevented the anti-Fascists from achieving what they called 'progressive democracy'. However, much of the early research by Resistance institutions was based on sources conserved in Resistance archives not on Allied documents and in the mid-1970s, David Ellwood wrote that there was still insufficient documentation to confirm the argument of Resistance historians that the Allies had intervened directly in Italian politics.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter examines the role of Civil Affairs Officers (CAOs) in Allied Military Government in the period of great social tension following the war. CAOs were responsible for the general supervision of the various *comuni* or administrative districts. CAOs wrote detailed reports which in many ways epitomized army attitudes towards Italian society and politics and the documents helped shape Allied thinking. Naturally, their writings varied in substance and quality, but unlike army bureaucrats and high-ranking officers at AMG headquarters, CAOs were sending dispatches from the field. Although a great deal of excellent research has been done on the involvement of the Allies in Italian politics, most studies have jumbled together its protagonists as 'AMG', a somewhat vague term. This section also focuses on Friuli's all-important state institutions, the Prefettura, the Questura and the carabinieri, all of which provided AMG with impressions of post-war Udine, which, of course, found their way into CAO reports.

Civil Affairs Officers (CAOs) played a crucial role in establishing military government and their detailed reports on civil society helped map out the political situation in the province in the aftermath of the war. CAOs were in the vanguard of Allied Military Government, at the head of a vast army<sup>2</sup>, the British Eighth Army,



and were privileged observers as Italy entered a crucible in the period 1946 and emerged as a democratic republic.

Not themselves Italian, it is reasonable to conclude that CAOs had little or no direct experience of Italian political and cultural life other than the exceptional circumstances of the war, a turbulent period of social and economic crisis. It is quite possible that many British officers were more familiar with the classical history of the peninsula read in public schools and at Oxford or Cambridge than with contemporary events in Fascist Italy. With notable exceptions, CAOs did not speak the language, and had to make use of interpreters whenever they met local officials or members of the general public.

This meant that CAOs did not see Italian society through its broadsheets, *Libertà*, *Il Nuovo Friuli*, *Il Gazzettino*, and later *Il Messaggero Veneto* or other important publications which rolled from the presses to an increasingly wide public. These publications could have provided a useful adjunct to confidential reports and may even have helped form a more accurate picture of civil life or at very least a more balanced assessment of the political parties. In particular, the Communist Party demonstrated in the local press that, among other things, its intellectuals had a good grasp of ‘the problem of Trieste’, were contributing to ‘high’ culture, and were pressing for early elections and a Constituent Assembly—political goals that led away from the notion that some kind of armed insurrection might be attempted. In particular, the quality of journalism in the local Communist Party broadsheet, *Lotta e Lavoro*, was very high and owed much to its association with the prestigious national daily *L’Unità*, founded by Antonio Gramsci. Not only did *Lotta e Lavoro* throw much light upon post-war social problems, but the broadsheet also conveyed a fairly accurate picture of the tensions within Friulian society. Rural poverty loomed large in its pages, but so did a widely shared desire for reform. Above all, the editorial repeatedly argued that a meaningful reconstruction had to be based on a clear understanding of what had gone wrong in the past.

In November 1945, the CAO of Pordenone and Sacile, Captain Chamlers of the Royal Artillery, requested ‘that copies of the Eighth Army News and the Stars and Stripes be sent out to CAOs so that they may be kept conversant with the outside world.’ This remark seems to confirm that most CAOs did not read the



Italian broadsheets which were full of international and local news, but rather, in good faith, would rely primarily on the version of events in the literature of the armed forces, which no doubt had its own alternative views.

As it was, CAOs relied heavily on fragmentary reports from the Prefettura, Questura, and carabinieri and, to a certain extent, on the word of informants as a basis for generalizing about consensus, dissent, and public mood; these views alone did not always provide perfect insight into post-war society. Moreover, it is equally important to note that Prefettura and Questura reports were sometimes designed to inculcate certain notions about society and politics in this border province, notions that Slav nationalists were a menace to public order and that Communism was a real threat to democracy.

In addition, most, perhaps all, British officers possessed stereotype notions of Italy and the Italians, still current today, as backward, corrupt, and chaotically administered, whilst the British tended to think of themselves as progressive, hardworking, and efficient: they were confident that they knew what was the right and practical thing to do. Not only had the war proved that Britain still counted in the world, but that its people were prepared to stand up to tyrants. For many CAOs, Italy's dismal war effort and subsequent changing of sides only confirmed the Machiavellian nature of Italians and the cultural superiority of the British, which in part justified military government. In short, it can be said that most British officers had a high regard for Italy, but not the Italians. Such condescending views no doubt coloured reports on civil society during the period of military government.

To be fair to British officers, however, Allied Military Government was highly desirable in that it was better than Nazi occupation and a continuation of the war. Also, it is worth remembering that CAOs genuinely wanted post-war Italy to get off to a good start, and no doubt believed military government might correct some of the injustices and errors of the past. There is also the important question of morale among AMG personnel. What could motivate CAOs to learn more about Italy and the Italians beyond stereotype notions given that the war in Europe had already been won and that mass demobilisation was rapidly depleting the British army? The vast majority of officers must have equated the war's end with a return to Britain and there was doubtless some resentment about having to stay behind and deal with the

continuities of Italian history and the problems of post-war reconstruction. More than anything else in June 1945, war-weary CAOs wanted to go home, and the general winding down of Allied Control in other parts of the north suggested that Udine would soon be handed over to the Italians. Paradoxically for AMG, the oldest and most experienced officers were the first age groups to be sent home. As early as February 1946 there were already a number of British officers new to the province, who had never been a CAO before and who did not share the collective experience of the war.<sup>3</sup>

It could also be argued that CAO reports were never written for a wide public, but rather for the army leadership and were in part written to impress higher authority and demonstrate that the officers were good observers, tuned to the wavelength of military thinking. Moreover, whilst apparently striving for professional detachment, officers often conveyed an impression of being very conservative, and this in part accounts for the cynical tone in much of their writing on Italian society. The goal of this chapter is to answer one question. To what extent did Civil Affairs Officers demonstrate a good grasp of the realities of politics and society in Friuli?

Civil Affairs Officers who had already served in AMG in southern or central Italy during the war found a very different situation in Udine from that experienced in the rest of the peninsula. Here was a border province in a region that was politically and ethnically divided and thus fraught with potential conflicts: just before the war's end, Tito and the Yugoslav partisans had launched a major offensive against the retreating Germans in Venezia Giulia and had occupied the principal port in the Adriatic before the Allies reached a political settlement on the future of Trieste. Moreover, the Allies expected that Yugoslavia would try to claim all the territory which Italy had won during the First World War and perhaps additional lands in Friuli, and that this might cause dangerous complications in northeast Italy. Although Tito agreed to withdraw his troops from Friuli in June 1945, in the period I am discussing here, the disputed region remained divided into what became two zones: Zone A, Trieste occupied by AMG and zone B, the Isonzo valley and Capodistria under Yugoslav military government. Hence in Udine there were many tensions lying just below the surface. This situation gave CAOs a particularly

important role in Friuli since their observations on local politics undoubtedly contributed to the wider picture.

The first reports from Udine described a picture of political turbulence. The Allies had some evidence to suggest that Yugoslav partisans intended to establish themselves as an alternative authority in Friuli in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation. When CAOs arrived in the province they found that the Yugoslav army had issued mobilisation orders in some border communities occupied by Tito's troops. For example, in the Italian town of Gorizia more than five hundred men had fled to Udine after the Yugoslav army had sent them call up papers.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the first Intelligence Corps officers could see that Italian partisan units from the Garibaldi Division were circulating in vehicles with Yugoslav army markings which conveyed the impression that the Italian Communists were in fact under the command of the Yugoslav forces.<sup>5</sup> Slovene officers in Udine had demanded a supply of requisitioning books from the non-Communist Osoppo partisans<sup>6</sup> and there was a large number of Yugoslav, Czech and Polish refugees housed in a high school (*liceo classico*) where the Slovene battalion was billeted and Tito's troops were trying to win over the refugees by supplying them with red stars.<sup>7</sup> Slovene troops also set up roadblocks in Friuli supposedly as part of their effort to prevent Nazis and Fascists from escaping justice, but troops at the check points were hostile towards Christian Democrat partisans and deprived Osoppo units of identity cards, weapons and vehicles. This naturally suggested to the British that Tito's troops were trying to manoeuvre non-Communist partisans out of the way.<sup>8</sup> Slovene troops wanted a prominent role in searching for and arresting Nazis and Republicans,<sup>9</sup> but, according to the Allies, at least half the roadblocks established by the Yugoslavs were wholly unnecessary and caused much friction with the Christian Democrat Resistance.<sup>10</sup> In a confidential report, the AMG Provincial Commissioner admitted that he did not trust the Yugoslav commander in Udine or his commissar in part because he had obtained little information from them during their meetings.<sup>11</sup> Another British officer wrote that the difficulties were caused by Slovene officers in Tito's army who were more militant than the rank-and-file troops, and that the political commissars were unpopular with ordinary soldiers who wanted nothing more than to return home to Yugoslavia now that the war was over.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, AMG believed that many

Italian partisans had sold their weapons to Slovene troops during the brief occupation of Friuli.<sup>13</sup> British Intelligence officers offered these incidents as proof that some kind of insurrection might be attempted by Slovene partisans.

The early Intelligence reports conveyed a picture of popular resentment at the Yugoslav presence in town. CAOs noted that the Yugoslavs did not receive a rapturous reception in Udine when another two hundred Slovene partisans arrived on 12 May and that their commissars had difficulty in finding billets.<sup>14</sup> Yugoslav troops continued to arrive in town until 15 May when about 60 per cent of the Yugoslav army stationed there withdrew from Friuli and crossed the Isonzo River, and according to one Allied report, there was much relief that the quasi-insurrectionary occupation of Udine had ended.<sup>15</sup> All these examples served to emphasize the CAO's view that the Yugoslavs were very unpopular with the local population.

Another perceived problem for CAOs was the Friulian Resistance. The partisan insurrection between 28-30 April was the culmination of twenty-two months of popular struggle and, for many of those who had taken part in it, the Resistance wiped the slate clean and showed an alternative Italy. That the province of Udine had been liberated by partisans alone suggested that some Friulians would question the need for military government now that the war was over and the province was back in Italian hands. Worse, AMG intended to deny the Resistance organisation, the Committee for National Liberation (*Comitato di liberazione nazionale* or CLN), a prominent role in local government even though the Allies themselves had solid evidence that the Resistance committees in the so-called liberated zones 'had worked out an administration which, considering the difficulties of the situation, was surprisingly efficient'.<sup>16</sup> In fact on 4 May, the Provincial Commissioner formally requested the CLNP, which had hitherto administered the town, to hand over power to AMG and the partisan organisation was to be no more than a consultative body for CAOs.<sup>17</sup> It followed that AMG refused to define any responsibilities for the CLN, who were forbidden to send delegations to Rome without military approval. In summing up the new position of the CLN, AMG declared that the council 'had no power or legal status'.<sup>18</sup>

However, it is worthwhile noting that, during May, local CLNs continued to exercise their authority and issue proclamations despite the fact that the Allies had



outlawed the practice and had torn down most of the notices.<sup>19</sup> In fact the Allies noted that the CLN continued to be an alternative source of authority, especially in virtually unpoliced rural areas where there were still no British troops or CAOs.<sup>20</sup> Also the Allies believed that Resistance activists exerted a powerful and negative influence on both the Questore and the Prefect who were unable to make decisions or give their opinions autonomously because they had to consult with partisans.<sup>21</sup> Later in 1946, the Provincial Commissioner remarked that 'the CLN [was] useful if composed of sensible people willing to cooperate'.<sup>22</sup> Thus AMG was hostile to the CLN because the latter viewed itself as an alternative source of authority and this, in part, explains why the Provincial Commissioner placed so much power in the hands of CAOs.

There were other reasons why CAOs were wary of partisans. One was simple ignorance: prior to the mass insurrection there was very little Allied involvement with the Friulian Resistance, especially the Communist Divisions, and the number of SITREP messages sent by Intelligence Corps in the advancing Eighth Army suggests that the Allies knew nothing about the real intentions of the Resistance, and were concerned that the movement might use the national insurrection as a green light for a socialist revolution.

There was also the general question about the ambivalent nature of links between Italian Communists and Yugoslav Communists and divisions within the Resistance itself. Early SITREP messages tried hard to understand to what extent, if any, the Friulian Resistance was being controlled or influenced by Tito and the Yugoslav partisans. The army Intelligence Corps could see that the Yugoslavs were not planning any immediate military aggression—SITREP reports were able to establish that, although a large number of Yugoslav troops were on the move and crossing the Isonzo in Friuli, there was no reconnaissance; nor were the Yugoslavs bringing large amounts of ammunition, petrol and other materiel with them into Italy. It cannot be argued, therefore, that the Allies were reacting to a real military threat from Communist forces; though the ideological threat was much harder for the British army Intelligence Corps to assess. Thus a crucial role of CAOs was to observe and report on the activities of partisans. Similarly, in the early briefings, the Provincial Commissioner suggested that CAOs were to prioritize investigations into



the political background of new CLN-nominated, appointments, rather than explore the Fascist past of officials who had served under the Nazis.<sup>23</sup>

For their part, many local partisans were highly critical of the Allies' attitude towards them and expected AMG to take some interest in their social plight.<sup>24</sup> According to the Questore, unemployed partisans were particularly bitter to see some Germans who had worked for the Todt Organisation being given jobs in private companies in Friuli.<sup>25</sup> CAOs were supposed to do everything they could 'to absorb patriots into employment after they had been disbanded, and all employers [were to] be urged to give them preference'<sup>26</sup> but in fact very little was done by the Allies in Udine. During the heady experience of the Liberation, some AMG officers had promised partisans that they would receive jobs, but the work never materialised.<sup>27</sup> The impression given in the Questura daily reports was one of great poverty among many former partisans. The Questore pointed out that even men who had jobs were often living in extreme hardship: the income of many commuting workers was so low that they were unable to afford basic travel costs like the purchase of a bicycle.<sup>28</sup>

How did CAOs establish their authority? In rural areas, an important initial task was to compel local CLN officials to embrace AMG, usually by pointing out that the communities would receive none of the benefits of Allied aid, including food, medicines, clothes, and reconstruction materials, if they refused to accept military government. In other words, their authority was bolstered by the power to provide much needed provisions, and this was used as a form of control. Moreover, CAOs appointed the local majors after an interview and could remove them without giving the communities a reason. CAOs could also jail Italian officials who had the insolence to organise any sort of demonstration or strike.

AMG also introduced oppressive restrictions, including a curfew from 2100 to 0600 hours,<sup>29</sup> though the Questore pointed out that most Friulians questioned the need for a measure that was wholly incompatible with the notion of liberation.<sup>30</sup> Initially, AMG banned political gatherings and introduced press censorship and travel restrictions, and, according to the Provincial Commissioner, political debate was stymied by these measures.<sup>31</sup> The case of Udine serves to remind us that the Allies perpetuated some Fascist war regulations associated with the Fascist regime as well as with Nazi occupation. It can be argued that such unpopular restrictions also

encouraged CAOs to become insulated individuals and this may have added to the difficulties of assessing consensus and public mood.

As regards travel restrictions, it is interesting to note that, in the months following the Liberation, many Italians tried to obtain travel permits to cross the Isonzo River and enter Zone B which was controlled by the Yugoslav partisans. Even though the Christian Democrat press was full of anti-communist and anti-Slav stories which described Zone B as dangerous, many people were not discouraged from travelling to areas occupied by Tito's forces. The carabinieri rejected most requests for travel permits, while the Field Security Section policed railway booking offices to ensure that only civilians with official AMG travel permits could obtain tickets. This no doubt gave the impression that few people in Udine dared to venture into areas under Communist occupation because Slavs were now hostile towards ordinary Italians, but the real picture was very different: the Allies and the carabinieri were preventing large numbers from visiting Trieste and other areas under Yugoslav control.

The CAO's in Udine tended to write mainly about politics, and, in particular, focussed on the activities of the local Communists and Socialists. In addition to police reports, CAOs also relied on information from ordinary Italians in the form of denunciations which were then conveyed to the Provincial Commissioner in the 'Political' section of CAO weekly reports. Communist activities, however, were often reported in the Public Safety section of a SITREP rather than in the Political section. Not only did this insinuate that the party was a potential threat to the general public, but it also criminalized some forms of legitimate party action, arguably the real stuff of politics. Significantly, activity by the Communist Party was invariably described as 'propaganda' or 'pro-Slav propaganda' or 'anti-Allied propaganda',<sup>32</sup> and, in a very one-sided discourse on local politics, CAOs tended to magnify the 'negatives', like signs of dissent, protests, and disorder, and invariably blamed demonstrations on the Communist Party which was supposedly pulling the strings. By contrast, the political scene in November was described as orderly and 'quiet' because the Christian Democrats had apparently made significant gains in popularity at the expense of the Communists.<sup>33</sup>

Worse, evidence indicates that political incidents reported in the Public Safety section were conveyed to the Public Safety Division and to the Field Security Section of AMG and may very well have led to arrests and imprisonment. One CAO report from Latisana, for example, wrote that 'the leader of the Communist Party has been causing trouble' in the village of Teor and 'has the *Sindaco* completely terrorized and has taken office in the town hall.' Perhaps he was a bully, but it is difficult to believe that the man, who was the village schoolmaster, was terrorising the mayor and, from the details, it seems there was no firm evidence against the Communist. Nonetheless, the CAO concluded by noting that 'his arrest by the Italian authorities in connection with a previous offence is being arranged'.<sup>34</sup> What is most noticeable in the CAO's handling of the case is the complete lack of evidence from the other side. The mayor, who presumably had made the allegations, was a Christian Democrat and political foe, and the carabinieri major who had been following the case was himself being investigated as part of the purge of Republican sympathisers.

Another report by the same CAO described how during one demonstration Communist protestors had had the insolence to tear down the Italian flag. The CAO went on to say that:

an anonymous letter was received by this office naming ringleaders and urging their arrest. This confirmed information already received and steps have been taken to ensure prompt action by the Italian authorities. The local Commander of the carabinieri, who visited Latisana during the week, has promised to deal with the case at once.<sup>35</sup>

This example from Udine illustrates that the slightest, most trifling, accusation about a relatively minor incident could be magnified and might result in the arrest of Communists based on anonymous letters, accusations, and hearsay rather than hard evidence.

Another feature of CAO reports is that criminal activity was often seen as political. Thus the Provincial Commissioner was able to conclude in his monthly report, which was really a summary of all the CAO reports, that 'lawlessness in the province is the responsibility of the Communist Party with which the Youth Front is allied'.<sup>36</sup> In a sense, local Communists and Socialists laid themselves open to the charge of causing trouble because they were often exclusively concerned with the plight of their fellow-citizens. True, the party was quick to assist workers and

peasants in the organisation of demonstrations or strikes. Yet it is also true that the experience of the war and Resistance had done much to raise the political consciousness of ordinary Italians, and therefore many had more clearly defined goals. Furthermore, without remembering how poor many of them were in the post-war period it is difficult to understand why groups were pressing the authorities to do something and why the Communists were quick to organise them. Certainly, with all the talk in the local press about a new start, many members of the public now had great expectations of Allied Military Government in the province. It is worth taking a closer look at the conditions prevailing in Latisana to illustrate this point.

Latisana, like many towns in Friuli, was a picture of intense misery after the war. It had a population of about 10,000 inhabitants, including some 200 refugees from southern and central Italy, but many had been made homeless by the bombing and now maintained a precarious existence. Unlike the rural villages which had been burned down by the Germans, Latisana had been severely damaged by Allied warplanes, but, in the weeks following the Liberation, shortages of funds and materials meant that little had been done about the overarching problems of unemployment and reconstruction. About 450 Garibaldi (Communist) partisans had operated in the area during the war, but when the Allies occupied Latisana the CLN appointed a new Christian Democrat mayor, Antonio Tonnelli, and retained the town clerk, a local official who had been employed by the RSI during German occupation.<sup>37</sup>

The budget allocated for Latisana was so tiny that there were no funds to pay council workers' wages still less to start repairing the catastrophic war damage, and unemployment was acute: the only work the council could offer locals was shovelling gravel and earth to fill in anti-tank ditches that TODT workers had dug for the Nazis. The CAO described the food situation as 'not bad' because it was assumed that most peasants were self-sufficient, however this was not in fact the case. As his own report shows, the Mayor was aware of the magnitude of rural poverty and had begun to hand out maize flour to the poorest people in the area, though this was quickly stopped because the Prefect had not authorized the distribution of emergency provisions. The hospital in Latisana was the worst bombed in the whole province, according to one CAO report. In mid-winter, six months after the Liberation, none of



the windows on the ground floor, including the operating theatre, had glass and although the hospital was comparatively well-equipped, surgical patients had to be sent to Udine.<sup>38</sup> All these factors help us understand why there was so much agitation in Latisana.

In a sense, the CAO for Latisana was at the mercy of his informants who claimed that most of the population supported the Christian Democrats, but the Resistance in the area had been organized by Communist Garibaldi partisans and it is reasonable to assume that the party had gained some prestige from its involvement in the war of liberation. Nevertheless, the CAO invariably came down on the side of Christian Democrats.

Another method of dealing with Communists or Socialists who were perceived to be a threat to public order was the 'special arrest' of individuals 'on the grounds that the people concerned are dangerous characters from the army's point of view'. This gave CAOs widely defined powers of arrest in that they had only to report individuals to the AMG Provincial Commissioner as being 'a threat' and the people would be arrested and expelled from Udine province in a practice reminiscent of Fascism's *confino*. Papers in the AMG files reveal that the Questura had a crucial role in the 'special arrest' of ordinary Italians because the Questore occasionally provided the Public Safety Officer, Major Manuel, with the names of people who were said to be involved in 'pro-Slav activities'. The individuals were then detained while the Field Security Section investigated the accusations. Of course, this was a standard tactic of military occupation since 'dangerous characters' was a sweeping term that could apply to anyone who aired strong criticism of Allied policy and was believed to be an opponent of AMG. Repression, it seems, was deliberately visible as in the case of the arrests of Communist leaders which also served as a warning to the others.

A good example of special arrests by the Allied authorities occurred on 8 December 1945 in Udine. Fourteen partisans were arrested in Udine by the Field Security Section, and among others, AMG detained men who had been prominent Communist activists in the Resistance, including the leaders of the 'Silvio Pellico' Brigade, the GAP<sup>39</sup> Commander in Latisana, and the head of the Resistance information service (*Servizio informativo segreto*).<sup>40</sup> The men were all placed in



solitary confinement for months, apparently to prevent them communicating with each other, but the psychological impact of this scenario must have been severe for at some point one of partisans tried to commit suicide in his cell. Although the detained partisans were supposed to be informed about the grounds of their arrest, in complete disregard for Italian law, none of the men, their lawyers, or their relatives were told why they had been picked up and were being held in jail. The only answer AMG gave was that 'for security reasons it is not considered prudent to go into full details concerning the activities of the arrestees'.<sup>41</sup> This case illustrates how AMG rode rough shod over Italian law.

It is true that AMG found hidden arms on several occasions, but it is equally true that many searches by the Field Security Section, carabinieri, and ordinary troops often failed to find a single pistol or bullet despite an informant's tip-off that civilians were hiding arms. In one typical incident in November 1945, the CAO of Pordenone received information from informants that a rural family in Brughera was hiding weapons. Accompanied by carabinieri from Sacile and a sergeant of the Field Security Section, the CAO turned up in an army truck at the house and ordered the carabinieri to place the male members of the family in prison while he interrogated the female members, all of whom denied the accusations. 'There were no arms to be found as hoped' wrote the CAO 'and informants said that the family had removed the weapons with wheelbarrows during the night'.<sup>42</sup> This incident illustrates how the least evidence of arms drew the immediate attention of the carabinieri and Field Security Section.

Some reports of arms-trafficking were highly romanticized. One mysterious woman known only as 'Norma' was said to be gunrunning in the mountains between Italy and Yugoslavia. She was driven away each night by a sinister blue Lancia Aprilia and whisked off to an unknown destination in the hills, and it was said that She spoke impeccable English and was playing a double game with the Allies. The suspected possession of arms was one of the devices used to initiate house searches and resulted in numerous arrests of men and women in Friuli whom the Allies suspected of hiding weapons. Reports suggested that the Communist Party organized arms dumps, perhaps for an eventual insurrection against the Allies should Tito

overrun the province, and the notion was used to undermine the party's democratic credentials.

By contrast, the illegal possession of weapons by right-wing reactionaries and by the carabinieri and Italian army officers involved in arms-trafficking was never criminalised to the same extent, perhaps because AMG perceived those individuals as counter-revolutionaries who were to be treated in a very different way. For example, the CAO of Palmanova wrote in October 1945 that Osoppo partisans had encouraged DC sympathisers 'to take adequate measures for their own protection' that is, to procure weapons because 'it is rumoured that the Communists in San Giorgio are planning an armed uprising in support of Marshal Tito'.<sup>43</sup> The CAO for Palmanova seems to have thought that there was nothing wrong with this attempt to create a citizen militia, and yet the possession of illegal arms was an offence against Allied military proclamations and could result in a summary trial and heavy sentencing,<sup>44</sup> as was illustrated in the case of a Communist militant who received a 12-month prison sentence for being in possession of a pistol.<sup>45</sup>

It should also be remembered that the Resistance had handed over a large number of weapons to the Allies when the partisans were demobilised. Between 11 June to 10 July 1945 partisans handed over about 18,300 rifles to the Allies<sup>46</sup> which testified to the military power of the partisans at the end of the war but also suggested that the Resistance was committed to disarmament. The arms were handed over to the carabinieri and the Guardia di Finanza who were supposed to hand over the weapons to army artillery depots in Udine. The argument was that a democratic culture would not flourish if large numbers of civilians possessed weapons. In September 1946, however, it was discovered that some of the weapons handed in by partisans had found their way to shadowy, stay-behind organisations in Friuli. Light is thrown upon this event by key reports in an AMG file entitled 'Osoppo' which contains statements by high-ranking officers. In one document, an Italian army General hints that AMG was well-informed about arms-trafficking in Udine and that the Allies seemed to be condoning the supply of weapons to Christian Democrat partisans whilst sequestering arms in the possession of Communist groups.<sup>47</sup>

In another memorandum on the Osoppo situation in Friuli, a Lt-Colonel on the army General Staff went much further and wrote that he believed the Italian

government and the Italian army were somehow involved in supplying arms to groups of former Osoppo partisans, and that it was all a matter for ALCOM—the Allied Commission.<sup>48</sup> These comments may explain why the Provincial Commissioner was reluctant to make an example, through trial, of the right-wing reactionaries; in most cases no charge was advanced. The Provincial Commissioner closed the file with the dry comment ‘I have studied all aspects of this case and am satisfied that the fewer people who know the real reasons for the acquittal of the defendants, the better it will be for all concerned’.<sup>49</sup> Admittedly, police and army officers involved in arms-trafficking wove a tangled web and it is therefore difficult to understand which parts of their statements are true, but it is important to appreciate that the Allies had unwritten rules about how to deal with the opponents of Communism.

AMG reports show that British officers were very anxious to get information from ordinary Italians, especially about Communist and criminal activities in the area. Without the active collaboration of the general population, it was very difficult for the Allies to enforce AMG proclamations. There is some evidence in the files of the involvement of priests as informants and denouncers in Allied Military Government. For example, priests denounced Italian Communists who were working in refugee centres in Udine. Priests also informed on their own parishioners and the Allies took such denunciations particularly seriously since they came from a respected authority within the community. It is doubtful that priests had witnessed many of the incidents which they reported to the Allies, therefore how they came upon the information is an interesting question. On 7 October 1945, for example, the CAO of Palmanova wrote that confidential information he had received from the parish priest of Santa Maria La Longa about Slav activity in the area contained the names of two people who were alleged to have sold British teleprinters to the Yugoslavs. This serious allegation was forwarded to the Field Security Section. In the same report, it is evident that a Christian Democrat partisan, a member of the Osoppo Intelligence Branch, was working as an informant for the Allies and had supplied the CAO with additional information on Yugoslav activities in the town.<sup>50</sup>

Even when he had no definite evidence or names to pass onto AMG, files show that the Archbishop of Udine was particularly concerned with the ‘criminal

tendencies' of former left-wing Resistance activists and made sure that cases involving Communists reached the desk of the Provincial Commissioner. For example, in the early days of May 1945, the Archbishop of Udine reported the killings of four Fascists by Communist partisans who had probably decided to settle some old score.<sup>51</sup> In fairness we have to keep in mind that CAOs were instructed by AMG to enlist the help of prominent figures in society, notably the Archbishop, who could help form a picture of the local situation, and, on the face of it, priests were well-placed to provide inside information, but it meant that the door was open to clergymen who wanted to come forward with their suspicions and accusations, and it can be seen that their bias found its way into CAO reports.

Why did priests inform CAOs when they suspected that Communists were breaking the law? Anti-communism seems to be a decisive factor in all the cases. Perhaps informing on others also owed something to the denunciatory atmosphere of the Fascist period and Nazi occupation. It seems difficult to argue that all denouncers believed that they were reporting serious crimes since Christian Democrats often denounced Communists on quite frivolous grounds that would not even get them into trouble with the Allies. For instance, DC leaders were furious and informed the AMG authorities that Communists, posing as pilgrims, had taken the Vatican bus service from Udine to Rome to attend the National Congress of the Communist Party.<sup>52</sup> To summarise, then, the case of Udine suggests that denunciations were a form of direct collaboration with the Allies since important information often led to house-searches and arrests, but to say that priests and Christian Democrats denounced Communists and Socialists is not to say that they supported the Allies; rather, AMG provided an opportunity to oppress potential opponents.

#### THE PREFETTURA, QUESTURA AND CARABINIERI

The Prefettura, the Questura and the carabinieri all provided CAOs with important information. To start with the Prefettura. It should be appreciated that AMG normally governed the province by officially endorsing the Prefect's orders and circulars rather than issuing its own regulations because AMG proclamations were solely reserved for emergency situations, not humdrum bureaucracy. In



addition, to simplify a complex legal situation, all Italian laws passed in Rome were also valid for Udine unless the AMG Provincial Commissioner annulled them.<sup>53</sup> This meant that the Prefettura had a crucial role in military government. Allied documents prepared before the occupation of northern Italy show that AMG fully intended to retain the Prefettura staff that had served under the Fascists and the Nazis. To be fair, the Allies doubted that they would find war criminals still at their desks, as it was expected that notorious collaborators would flee the town following the popular insurrection and the disintegration of the German armed forces in Italy. This in fact is precisely what happened: the RSI Prefect, Riccardo De Beden, left his post three days before the Liberation and the RSI Questore, Nicola Bruni, tried to flee but was captured together with his eighteen year old son by local partisans who recognized the notorious Republican in civilian clothing. The Podestà of Udine avoided capture, but was later arrested in Austria as a war criminal and brought back to the province.

Even so, a purge of the Prefettura should have been one of the first and most necessary acts of military government not least because it was to become the principal source of important information for AMG and the institution in part shaped Allied thinking about salient issues: the problem of Trieste, the nature of Communism, the extent of the so-called 'Slav menace'. As the Prefettura officials made sketch after sketch of the political situation in the province, it was surely important to understand the mind-set of those who penned confidential reports for military government. In theory at least, the Prefect was responsible to the Italian state alone, but from the start the Allies made it perfectly clear to the new Prefect, Agosto Candolini, that he was working for AMG and was subordinate to the Provincial Commissioner.

It is perhaps understandable that in the first topsy-turvy days following Allied occupation, there was little questioning of the role of Italian officials in the Prefettura who had served under German occupation, until things had cooled down. There were just so many other pressing problems, including military demands, and there was no telephone service between Udine and other provinces in June which slowed down bureaucracy.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, it is striking that the Field Security Section only interrogated Riccardo De Beden on 27 June 1945, almost two months after the Allies had arrived. According to the Field Security Section of the Intelligence Corps,



previous Allied Intelligence sources and CLN reports confirmed his statement, but, almost as an afterthought, the army captain who wrote the Field Security Section report concluded that it seemed very strange that an individual who had been Prefect throughout the period of German occupation was not at least guilty of being a Nazi sympathizer.<sup>55</sup>

That the Allies clearly did not want sweeping changes to the Prefettura personnel even though it had unmistakably been an RSI institution, was confirmed when the Provincial Commissioner reviewed its staff. It would be wrong to write that the Allies were unaware that Prefettura staff had a Fascist past and that much was concealed from AMG because documents show that the bureaucrats had to fill out a form detailing their past as civil servants for both the Fascist and the Nazi regimes and describe how they had reached their rank within the Prefettura. This procedure meant that the Provincial Commissioner and the Prefect were well-informed about the past records of Prefettura staff. In a sense the RSI officials, who had been on the losing side during the war, had to reapply for their old jobs, and from the impressive records of military service and awards, PNF membership dates and meteoric careers during the Fascist period they listed, they were cocksure about being reemployed. In at least one case, a former RSI official in the Prefettura, Giorgio Baccos, was approved with the remark 'very good' though his only recommendation was that of his father, Leopoldo Baccos, who had been vice-Prefect of Pola before the Italians were driven out of the region by Tito's partisans. It deserves noting that Giorgio Baccos was appointed by the Nazis in August 1944 when the German occupation of Friuli had entered its most murderous phase. Another official who had no previous experience in the Prefettura, but who was appointed by the RSI, was Luigi Danieli who had been an army officer and engineer from 1941 to September 1943. The Provincial Commissioner's remark was 'very inexperienced but enthusiastic'. Another official, the vice-Prefect Aldo Cuttini received a 'very good' remark even though he produced a blank form which stated only that he had been born in Udine in 1906 and at some point had been a corporal in the army. Not only did the Allies approve of individuals who had made a career during the Fascist period, but they also retained officials who had been directly installed by the Nazis during the worst phase of Italy's war. To summarise, then, the example of Udine shows that the Prefettura

which AMG inherited was not that far removed from the institution which had served under the RSI and German occupation. A further point can be made: on 24 May the provincial Commissioner changed both the Questore and vice-Questore, who had been appointed by the CLN, on the grounds that they were 'unqualified and inefficient' and therefore not fit for the job, but evidence shows that the attitude towards Prefettura staff who were not 'career men' and who had worked for the Fascists and the Nazis was of a very different nature.<sup>56</sup>

It is important to note that even those who were 'career men' that is, who had worked in the Questura since the 1920s or 1930s, had often benefited in some way during the Nazi period. The case of Udine suggests that the rigid distinction continually adopted by the Allies between career men and Nazi collaborators was in fact blurred by the events of 1943-45. For example, a so-called career man, Eugenio Nicolella, had been promoted in July 1944 when the Nazis and Republicans were conducting operations against rural communities with unprecedented savagery. Furthermore, in December 1944, at a time when the Italian Jews were being deported from the city, Eugenio Nicolella received an honorary degree in law from the University of Trieste, a dubious award which nevertheless enhanced his career prospects.

The decision not to remove Prefettura staff depended heavily on questionable assumptions about the definition of collaboration. Whether implicated in SS police-organised mass slaughter and persecution in Friuli or not—and there was often some legitimising Prefettura circulars behind direct action by SS police—at the very least officials had quietly watched while fellow Italians were rounded up and murdered or deported to death camps in Nazi Germany. In any event, AMG made no significant changes to the local Prefettura staff. There is some evidence to suggest that the Prefettura staff were useful to AMG as records show that some of the officials in Udine had previously served in areas now disputed by Tito's forces and had long experienced the problems of military occupation and Slavic Communism, and were therefore deemed to be of more value to AMG than the anti-Fascists who had fought in the Resistance.

I will now turn to another important institution, the Questura which also provided AMG with detailed daily reports on the situation in Udine, especially in

urban areas. The Garibaldi Division occupied the Questura on 30 April while the Resistance was still fighting Germans in the San Gottardo district of town, and Communist partisans discovered about one hundred Questura police officers still in service, all of whom were unarmed. At the war's end, the CLNP nominated a Communist Questore, Lino Zocchi, in part because a Christian Democrat, Agostino Candolini, had already been given the all-important post of Prefect. In addition, about six hundred partisans were employed by the new Questore to police the town.

However, in the first week of May, Army Intelligence Officers in the special forces unit known as the Coolant Mission Group recommended that a new police force should be formed with 'no party colours' that is, without partisans, a remarkably swift decision given that the Resistance had been in charge of the Questura for a mere six days.<sup>57</sup> The Coolant Mission Group complained that about two-fifths of the Friulian Resistance were Communist partisans and three-fifths were Christian Democrat partisans, whereas the town appeared to be completely in the hands of the Communist Party.<sup>58</sup> However, evidence shows that the Communists did not attempt to dominate the Questura at the expense of Osoppo forces. In fact the Garibaldi Commander invited the Osoppo partisans to send an equal number of cadres to form a police battalion, but the Christian Democrats refused to legitimise the new police force and sent only a few men who were wholly inadequate for the police duties—they possessed no weapons, among other things.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, we should not assume that all of the five or six hundred partisans who became police officers in the province were from the Garibaldi Division; many were from independent partisan brigades and even those from the Garibaldi Division were not a highly-politicised group—many were not even Communist party card-holders.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, in the days following the Liberation, there were no obvious examples of brutality and bloodshed to suggest that partisans could not guarantee the safety and discipline of fellow-citizens. On the contrary, a hand-written report by Colonel Willmer, an AMG legal expert in Udine, describes how partisan police arrested Republicans usually because local people had denounced notorious Fascists and RSI collaborators, and, from his account, there is little empirical evidence for the argument that partisans were not fit to police Udine. Certainly, it was not a witch-hunt still less a revolutionary purge of officials. Ultimately, the reports point out, it

was the new Questore who decided whether the people should be taken into custody or released and there was a proper register of all those held in prison.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the partisans were showing discipline and the legal officer's report did not contain any criticisms of the Resistance police battalion. If correct, his report shows that Resistance cadres were efficient police officers who obeyed orders; on the other hand, perhaps it was precisely because of their efficiency in arresting and jailing collaborators that the Provincial Commissioner decided to get rid of them. The point is that there were no Christian Democrats in the police force because the DC was unwilling to support radical changes to the Questura.

In any case, the Allies were convinced that the Questura and the police battalion were under Communist control, and believed this to be a particularly inappropriate situation for a province on the border with Yugoslavia. One of the most prominent activists in the Friulian Resistance, Mario Lizzero, known as 'Andrea', who later became a member of the national parliament, was regularly depicted by AMG as 'perhaps the most dangerous of Garibaldi leaders' and 'working in Udine as the Commissar of the Garibaldi Group of Divisions'. He was described as 'intelligent and unscrupulous', with 'complete control of the Communist Party in the whole of Venezia Giulia'. This report also showed that AMG believed 'that the Communist aim in Udine is to penetrate all municipal and provincial offices by placing Communist sympathisers in important institutions. In this, by one way or another [Andrea] is notably successful'.<sup>62</sup>

For this reason, on 24 May the Provincial Commissioner dismissed the Questore and the vice-Questore who had both been appointed by the leaders of the local Resistance, the Provincial Committee of National Liberation (CLNP). The official reason was that the men were inexperienced and unqualified but there can be little doubt that they were dismissed for their Communist beliefs. In response to the partisan involvement in the organisation, and in sharp contrast with his policy adopted for the Prefettura, the Provincial Commissioner wrote that it was necessary to make changes in the Questura and to bring up from the south 'men with professional experience',<sup>63</sup> essentially the same bureaucrats who had served under the Fascist regime, and who had no connection with anti-Fascism. In October the



Provincial Commissioner again wrote that more career officials were urgently required.<sup>64</sup>

The Allies wanted to appoint a certain Galliano as Questore, but there was severe opposition from the CLNP because of his Fascist past. In particular, on 22 May the CLNP President, Lo Curto, warned military government that officials who had served in the Questura would do a great deal of harm in the new Italy and he suggested that the Allies employ Carlo Bertodo, as Questore and Luigi Zoratti<sup>65</sup> as Vice-Questore.<sup>66</sup> It is interesting to note that the Allies sometimes reemployed Questura officials without checking their background. According to a report in AMG files which both the Prefect and the Questore saw,<sup>67</sup> Stefano Giulla, a Commissario in the Questura of Gorizia had been denounced by the CLN for abusing prisoners during the Resistance period. In particular, Giulla, who was now employed by the Allies in the Questura in Udine, was said to have arrested women so that he could rape them in police custody. According to the same file, another notorious collaborator, Dr. Pispica, who worked in the Questura, was responsible for rounding up hostages for the SS.<sup>68</sup> Another list in AMG hands alleged that Gian-Carlo Franceschinis, who was working in the Questura as Capo Gabinetto, had been a notorious Republican and was the author of numerous pro-Nazi articles in *Il Popolo*, including propaganda which attacked the Allies.<sup>69</sup>

What difference, if any, did such people make in the Questura? One particular example illustrates how the Questura provided the Allies with information that helped a notorious Fascist retain his job. Gastone Conti came to Udine in October 1937 from Pisa to become the headmaster of a school, the Istituto Tecnico Industriale Locatelli and soon became director of the local Fascist cultural institute (*Istituto di cultura fascista*), and a member of the province's *Direttorio del Fascio*. According to the CLN, Conti denounced teachers who allowed anti-Fascist comments in their classrooms and, from December 1943 onwards, he was a Nazi and Republican collaborator who, as part of a network of informers, encouraged unwitting pupils to denounce Resistance activity in their communities. The *Commissione di epurazione* found the CLN allegations to be true and dismissed Conti, though he was later reinstated by the Ministry of Education despite his Republican past. In May 1946, according to a copy of the document in Allied files,



the head of the political police in the Questura (*Il dirigente della squadra politica*) sent a report to the Questore which rejected the evidence of the CLN and the *Commissione di epurazione*, and claimed that Conti had never been a 'factious Fascist' and was in actual fact 'esteemed for his honesty and uprightness',<sup>70</sup> a statement which was completely untrue.

It should be noted that the Questura situation reports for AMG often contained serious accusations against Communists, but such reports were written up without mentioning that the information had come from paid informants not police officers. The difference was very important because Allied officers assumed they were reading facts that had been established by the Italian police when in reality they were reading nothing more than the suspicions and accusations of anonymous informants. Not that the Allies themselves did not use information provided by members of the public, but they did at least expect some indication of the reliability of informants. This, however, was missing from Questura reports. There is evidence that on at least one occasion the use of an informant led to falsification of the truth. The AMG Public Safety Officer complained to the Provincial Commissioner that 'a confidential informant' had passed on information to the Questura which yielded 'a number of inaccuracies' about two men who lived in the village of Cave del Previl and that the accusations had then appeared in the Questura Monthly Report of January 1946.<sup>71</sup>

At the war's end, the Questura in Udine was a radically different organisation from the traditional force characterized by Carmine Senise, Mussolini's Chief of Police from 1940 to 1943, who minimized the role of its police officers (*agenti di pubblica sicurezza*).<sup>72</sup> As the previous chapter showed, in July 1944 the SS had purged the Questura of elements, including the then Questore, Luigi Cosenza, who were not arch-Republicans or Fascists and who had expected some pretence of legality from the Nazis.<sup>73</sup> Thus in the period 1943 to 1945 the Questura had become an increasingly Fascist police force committed to ruthless repression of resistance.

It is worth remembering that there was a great deal of evidence in the wartime press about how the Questura had collaborated with the Nazis in opposing resistance in Friuli. As I have shown, anyone who wanted could read about Republican police operations against partisans, including blow by blow accounts in *Il*

*Popolo* where the Fascist paper boasted openly that the Republican Questura police officers (*agenti di P.S.*) were dealing with resistance. Anti-partisan operations were written up in the newspaper as if the participants were somehow 'heroic', and, of course, police funeral notices showed how the officials had been killed during Questura operations against the Resistance.<sup>74</sup>

Questura reports were of particular importance to CAOs stationed in urban and suburban areas, but, in rural areas, CAOs relied more on carabinieri reports, of greater significance to their understanding of the situation than other police sources. Thus the role of carabinieri in AMG also deserves some mention here, but has been largely neglected by historians. For example, it is not widely known that spearhead units of special 'AMG' carabinieri went into the province along with the British armed forces when the Allies occupied Udine. Being an integral part of the Italian army, the carabinieri were a militarized police force with both a military and a civil role in society, and this meant that the carabinieri were very useful for military government and were an alternative to partisan police battalions. Another reason the Allies brought extra carabinieri into northeast Italy was the belief that there were relatively few officers left in the province after German occupation. In fact, on paper the carabinieri preserved about half the force's strength during the Resistance period, but, although some three hundred carabinieri were still policing Friuli, most of them were wholly ineffective: they suffered from inadequate transport and equipment: some had no uniform or weapons whilst others patrolled with horses or bicycles.

Thus a priority for AMG was to enhance the carabinieri force by providing weapons, transport, and urging the Interior Ministry to do something about the poor morale among carabinieri, chiefly attributed to low-pay. The carabinieri reflected their royalist origins and their deep-rooted mistrust of Communists and Socialists, and therefore the introduction of this militarized police force into a Resistance stronghold was not without friction. In fact Garibaldi partisans in particular were hostile towards the force when it was introduced by AMG believing it was deliberately biased in favour of Osoppo partisans.<sup>75</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that CAO reports offered a distorted picture of post-war Friuli. In some ways, this was due to a sense of cultural superiority, mirrored in the victory of the Allied forces. The officers were blinkered by military

rhetoric and obedience, a profound distrust of Communism, and pre-war stereotype notions about Italy and Italians that were antecedent to the land-war in Europe. Their depictions of Communists sometimes resulted in the repression of working class and peasant activism or at very least denied some of Italy's post-war problems in need of reform.

It is often overlooked by historians that Civil Affairs Officers were also heavily influenced by the impressions that Prefettura and Questura reports conveyed to AMG. Studies of the role of Allied Military Government rarely point to the crucial influence of Italian institutions in shaping Allied thinking. Fascism had been overthrown, but a close look at the officials in the Prefettura and Questura in Udine shows that reactionary forces within these all-important institutions were not purged by AMG. On the contrary, the officials in the Prefettura and Questura seem to have made a remarkably easy passage from Fascist government to military government. Perhaps it is unfair to state, polemically, that AMG deliberately retained Fascist officials; without much knowledge of this important border region, the Provincial Commissioner was probably reluctant to dismiss police technocrats and replace them with inexperienced anti-Fascists. But there is no question that the retention of RSI bureaucrats, who were not sympathetic to the Communists, peasants or workers who feature so prominently in police reports, would also shape military government. It is difficult to believe that the implications of retaining RSI officials who had served under Nazi occupation somehow escaped the Allies, but one cannot ignore the consequences for Friulian society and politics. That the inclusion of RSI bureaucrats in the Prefettura and Questura had implications for military government, is demonstrated by the fact that the anti-communist sentiment of Italian officials easily found its way into CAO reports which supposedly evaluated and assessed the political situation in Friuli and this no doubt had some effect on higher military authority.

## Endnotes to Chapter Seven

<sup>1</sup> David.W.Ellwood, 'Nuovi documenti sulla politica istituzionale degli alleati in Italia: 1943-45', in *Italia contemporanea*, 119 (1975), 79-104.

<sup>2</sup> When the Eighth Army occupied Friuli, its rear security line stretched as far back as the River Piave.

<sup>3</sup> CAO FILE, 108, Minutes of CAO Conference, 20 February 1946. Private collection of Guido Jesù.

<sup>4</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 45/June 45, AMG Udine, 13 Corps, Coolant Group Report (SITREP), 12 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>5</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/122/134, AMG Udine Province Order 1, 13 May 1945, signed by Colonel H.N. Bright. The reason why Italian partisans had Yugoslav army markings on their vehicles was that as a result of German and Cossack offensives in December 1944, the Communist Garibaldi Natisone Division decided to move east into Yugoslavia and place itself under the command of the IX Corps of the Slovene Resistance. Whilst this action made sense militarily—the German anti-partisan operations would probably have annihilated the Division—politically it was a controversial in that Italian partisans were effectively leaving Friuli to fight for Yugoslavia, which suggested that their allegiance was to Communism rather than to Italy.

<sup>6</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 45/June 45, AMG Udine, 13 Corps, Coolant Group Report 14 May 1945, Top Secret. In the Friulian Resistance the anti-Fascist movement was roughly divided into Communist (Garibaldi) and non-Communist (Osoppo) partisans. In December 1943, members of the Christian Democrat Party (DC) and the Action Party (PDA) had formed the Osoppo Brigade to prevent Communist partisans from monopolizing anti-Fascist resistance. The formation of non-Communist groups affiliated to the DC was of particular political importance to the anti-Fascist Resistance movement in that it was subsequently able to recruit a number of prominent Catholics to cause who had hitherto been reluctant to join a socialist organisation. It should be noted that although all the big armed formations were party-affiliated, the majority of Resistance activists were not members of a political party. That said, of all the anti-Fascist political groupings in the province of Udine, the Communist Party had the dominant role in the organisation of armed Resistance. The majority of Communist leaders did not seriously believe that the party could seize power by force in a country occupied by the armed forces of the British Commonwealth and the United States, but it is probable that to keep the rank and file in line, partisan commanders often suggested that revolution was just round the corner.

<sup>7</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 45/June 45, AMG Udine, 13 Corps, Coolant Group Report, 14 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>11</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/12, Sitrep Reports May 1945/July 1945, AMG Udine to AMG Eighth Army, 17 May 1945. On 17 May 1945 Yugoslav troops briefly returned to the Cormons area of Friuli as withdrawal orders were either cancelled or postponed.

<sup>12</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 1945-June 1945, Report from B.C. Walsh, CAO in Tarvisio to Eighth Army, 28 May 1945.

<sup>13</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 Monthly Report, June 1945, AMG Udine.

<sup>14</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 45/June 45, AMG Udine, 13 Corps, Coolant Group Report (SITREP), 12 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>15</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/12 Sitrep Reports May 1945/July 1945, AMG Udine to AMG Eighth Army, 16 May 1945.

<sup>16</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/72 Provincial Administration Jan.-1945-Jul.1945, J.K. Dunlop to all Provincial Commissioners, 6 June 1945. The culminating point of the Friulian Resistance was the establishment a 'Liberated Zone' (la Zona libera della Carnia e del Friuli) in July—August 1944 after partisans managed to drive out the Nazis and Republican forces. The liberated area of some 2500 square kilometres, forty-one *comuni* and about 90000 inhabitants formed its own local CLN government or CLNZL (CLN della Zona Libera). There were also formal elections in which heads of households, including women, voted. According to one of the organizers, Mario Lizzero, not only was



the 'Partisan Republic of Carnia' of great symbol importance, but it was also useful experience of public administration for the post-war period. The Partisan Republic was also an important example of collaboration between Communist and non-Communist partisans in an anti-Fascist Resistance movement which had been hitherto politically divided and less committed to combined operations.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the CLNP di Udine meeting (Verbale Seduta) 4 May 1945, IFSML, b. 3.

<sup>18</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/72 Provincial Administration, (2 of 2), January to July 1945, AMG to Provincial Commissioner, June 1945.

<sup>19</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/122/134, AMG Udine Province Order 1, 13 May 1945, signed by colonel H.N. Bright. The proclamations were illegal and therefore removed by AMG.

<sup>20</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 Monthly Report, AMG Udine Province, June 1945.

<sup>21</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 Monthly Report, AMG Udine Province, June 1945.

<sup>22</sup> AMG HQ, Udine Province. Minutes of CAOs Conference, 26 February 1946. The collection of Guido Jesù.

<sup>23</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/72 Provincial Administration Jan. 1945-Jul. 1945. Provincial Commissioners address at a meeting of provincial officers, 27 May 1945.

<sup>24</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56, Mattinale del Giorno, Udine Questura Daily Reports, May-October 1945, 22 August 1945, signed Bertodo.

<sup>25</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56, Mattinale del Giorno, Udine Questura Daily Reports, May-October 1945, 22 July 1945, signed Bertodo.

<sup>26</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/13 CAOs Reports General May 1945-Dec. 1945, Points raised at Provincial Meeting of CAOs, to all Provincial Officers, 16 July 1945.

<sup>27</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56, Mattinale del Giorno, Udine Questura Daily Reports, May-October 1945. 22 August 1945, signed Bertodo.

<sup>28</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56, Mattinale del Giorno, Udine Questura Daily Reports, 23 August 1945, May-October 1945, signed Bertodo.

<sup>29</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/122/134, April-August 1945 in 10 300, HQ AMG Udine Province Order No.1, 13 May 1945. signed HN Bright.

<sup>30</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56, Mattinale del Giorno, Udine Questura Daily Reports, May-October 1945, 27 July 1945, signed Bertodo.

<sup>31</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province, June 1945.

<sup>32</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/33 CAO Reports Latisana, Jan 1945 June-Dec.1945, 9 July 1945

<sup>33</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/33 CAO Reports Latisana, Jan 1945 June-Dec.1945, 10 November 1945.

<sup>34</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/33. CAO Reports Latisana, June-Dec.1945, 2 November 1945.

<sup>35</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/33 CAO Report Latisana, June 1945-Dec 1945, 26 October 1945.

<sup>36</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 Monthly Report, Udine Province, Venezia Region, September 1945.

<sup>37</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/33 CAO Reports, Latisana, Jan 1945-Dec.1945, 3 July 1945.

<sup>38</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/33 CAO Report Latisana, Jan 1945-Dec 1945, 9 November 1945.

<sup>39</sup> After 8 September, the GAP formed (Gruppi d'Azione Patriottica), which were small, mobile groups of armed Communists, specialized in political assassination, who operated in urban areas. Later in 1944, the SAP were constituted (Squadre d'Azione Partigiana) and operated in the flatlands of Friuli.

<sup>40</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/169 Public Safety Policy Mar-1946-Aug.1946, Report, 12 April 1946.

<sup>41</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/169 Public Safety Policy Mar-1946-Aug.1946, Report, 16 May 1946. It seems that the arrests had something to do with the most controversial episode of the Resistance in Friuli. On the afternoon of 7 February 1945, a Communist unit of about one hundred GAP militants in civilian clothes appeared at the headquarters of the 1 Osoppo Brigade at La Malghe di Topli Uork, known as Porzùs, and accused the Osoppo partisans of playing a double game and collaborating with the enemy. The Commander and Commissar of the Osoppo Brigade, Francesco De Gregori and Gastone Valente respectively, were immediately shot, and the other fifteen partisans at the headquarters were arrested, put on trial and executed on 7—19 February, including 'Erme' the



brother of the poet, writer and film maker, Pier Paolo Pasolini. There has been much debate on the place of this singular event in the Friulian Resistance.

<sup>42</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/37 CAO Reports Sacile, CAO Report, 2 November 1945.

<sup>43</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/37 CAO Reports Palmanova, Report for 26 October 1945.

<sup>44</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/114 Osoppo, Report, Top Secret and Personal, Brigadier B.M. Archibald, Main HQ 13 Corps, 2 August 1946.

<sup>45</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/114 Osoppo, Memorandum for HQ 13 Corps, 12 June 1946, on the Osoppo situation.

<sup>46</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/48, Telegram from AMG Venezie Region to Provincial Commissioner 10 July 1945.

<sup>47</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/114, Osoppo, Report from General Armellini of the Italian army to the Ministry of War, Rome, 16 September 1946, on the movement of illegal arms.

<sup>48</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/114, Osoppo, Memorandum for HQ 13 Corps, 12 June 1946, on the Osoppo situation.

<sup>49</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/114 Osoppo, Top Secret and Personal, Brigadier B.M. Archibald, Main HQ 13 Corps, 29 July 1946.

<sup>50</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/37 CAO Reports Palmanova, May 1945-Nov 1945, 7 October 1945.

<sup>51</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/20 PSD, Miscellaneous Correspondence, June 45/Oct. 45, H.N. Bright to the Archbishop of Udine, 18 June 1945.

<sup>52</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province, Venezie Region, December 1945.

<sup>53</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/76 Provincial Administration December 1945, Memorandum on position of AMG Udine, 31 December 1945.

<sup>54</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province, June 1945,

<sup>55</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/72 Provincial Administration Jan. 1945-Jul. 1945, FSS

Interrogation of Riccardo De Beden, ex-Prefect of Udine, 27 July 1945.

<sup>56</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province, June 1945.

<sup>57</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300 128/170 Intelligence May 45/June 45, Coolant Mission Group SITREP no.7, 6 May 1945.

<sup>58</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/63 PSD, Questura Reports, Misc June-October 1945.

<sup>59</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/63 PSD, Questura Reports, Misc. June-October 1945, Report from the commander of the *Corpo Patrioti dell'Ordine*, 7 June 1945.

<sup>60</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province. May 1945.

<sup>61</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/12 (SITREP) AMG HQ to Provincial Commissioner, 6 July 1945.

<sup>62</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 45/June 45, AMG Udine, 13 Corps, Coolant Group Report, 11 May 1945, Top Secret.

<sup>63</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province, June 1945.

<sup>64</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 AMG Monthly Report, Udine Province and Venezie Region, October 1945.

<sup>65</sup> The prestige of Luigi Zoratti, a lawyer and carabinieri officer was also the result of his participation in the Resistance. His father, also a prominent anti-Fascist, was tortured and deported to Nazi Germany during the war.

<sup>66</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/43, Committee of National Liberation, Report from CLNP Udine signed by its President, Lo Curto, 22 May 1945.

<sup>67</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/47 Epuration, June 1945-Dec 1945, Provincial Commissioner to Questore and Prefect, 15 June 1945.

<sup>68</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, Subject Files, 10300/143/47. Epuration. June 1945-Dec 1945. Report undated and unsigned.

<sup>69</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/47 Epuration, June 1945-Dec 1945, List undated and unsigned.

<sup>70</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/69 Public Safety Policy March 1946-August 1946, Giuseppe Marsico to Questore on Gastone Conti, 22 May 1946.

<sup>71</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/69 Public Safety Policy March 1946-August 1946, Public Safety Officer to Provincial Commissioner, 1 April 1946.

<sup>72</sup> Senise, *Quando Ero Capo della Polizia 1940-1943*.

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<sup>73</sup> Guardia nazionale repubblicana ferroviaria Ispettorato on the arrests in Udine and the disarmament of carabinieri, 9 August 1944. See also the note of 10 November 1944 which suggests that the reason police officers in Udine were arrested was that they formed part of a Communist cell. ACS, GNR, b.44.

<sup>74</sup> See for example 'La Polizia repubblicana in lotta contro i banditi', *PdF*, 25 August 1944.

<sup>75</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/12, Sitrep Reports May 1945/July 1945, AMG Udine to AMG Eighth Army, 16 May, 1945.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE PURGE

As David Ellwood has remarked, the most decisive Allied contribution to the evolution of Italian political life in the years after Fascism lay in the restoration of the Italian state and its authority.<sup>1</sup> This chapter explores one important aspect of this process, the *epurazione* (purging process). Nearly all the historical judgements on the purging process in Italy during and after the war have been negative. Historians such as Roy Palmer Domenico and John Foot have argued that the purge was ineffectual and failed to cleanse Italian society in any meaningful sense.<sup>2</sup> My research on Udine confirms these conclusions for, here too, the purge was far from rigorous.

In the research that has been published on the purging process, to date, there has been little discussion about the local public prosecutor's role in the investigation of violent crimes committed by Republicans and collaborators. In discussing the failure of *epurazione*, Roy Palmer Domenico, among others, has tended to focus on the decisions made by trial judges rather than the role of the investigating magistrates. This chapter examines the hitherto neglected role of the public prosecutor's office in Udine in the purging process, and explores the interrelated themes of the purging Commission and the state of prisons in the province. I will also analyse the extent to which the Allies and the Prefect supported the investigating magistrates in their efforts to gather important evidence and find witnesses for the trials of Republicans and collaborators.

Many of the documents used in this chapter were written by Allied Legal Officers with AMG. The Legal Officers, who were in the vanguard of the Allied armed forces approaching Udine, fully expected the local judiciary to have been dissolved by the SS police services during Nazi occupation. The Provincial Legal Officer for Venezia Region, Colonel Willmer, at least hoped that members of the judiciary had not been deported to concentration camps or compromised by collaboration. Willmer had such difficulty finding soldiers with any legal expertise for the province of Udine that he himself had to leave his office at AMG HQ Venezia and go into the field, as it were. It was therefore a hastily mobilised team of British legal officers that entered the town with the vanguard of the armed forces on 1 May

1945. For the next forty-eight hours, AMG HQ Venezie heard nothing from Udine. Then, the first situation report (SITREP) came from the new Provincial Legal Officer Udine, C.E. Keysell, stating that the town's courtrooms had survived the Allied air raids and that the Pretura and high courts were sitting. There was also a new People's Court (*Tribunale del popolo*) sitting and it had already adjudicated one case, that of a notorious collaborator, Odorico Borsatti. Found guilty of mass murder, Borsatti was sentenced to death by firing squad on May 6, the day after his trial. He was supposed to be shot in the back sitting on a chair in the prison courtyard with the public prosecutor and the Procurator present. But when the Procurator, Carlo Bertodo of the People's Court, arrived at the prison, Borsatti was already dead: partisans, who now controlled the prison, had killed him as soon as he arrived back in prison from the People's Court. This episode brought discredit on the Resistance as gaolers and when Bertodo became Questore in June 1945 he made a great effort to draft in career prison guards. Incidents like this led Bertodo to conclude that the Resistance was unable to run the prison impartially or efficiently.<sup>3</sup>

However, the People's Court (*Tribunale del popolo*) was a conscious, organised attempt by the *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Provinciale di Udine* (CLNP) to purge collaborators, especially prominent Fascists and Republicans, and diffuse the public outrage at the terror that had been unleashed during German occupation. Resistance leaders believed that the purging of Republicans was a crucial aspect of Italy's rebirth and political renewal. If significant numbers of Republicans remained in influential positions, then there would be no regeneration of institutions that had made up the police state, a situation that might have far-reaching implications for Italian democracy in the post-war period. Allied Military Government, on the other hand, was concerned that the Resistance would use the *Tribunale del popolo* for political purposes, and perhaps even turn popular anger into a revolutionary channel. In particular, the Allies believed that, unlike the judiciary, the most prominent judges and jury members of the *Tribunale del popolo* could easily be linked to the anti-Fascist political parties of the CLNP. Therefore, in accordance with AMG policy, the Provincial Commissioner decided to abolish the *Tribunale del popolo* on the basis that it was a drumhead court.<sup>4</sup> As David Ellwood has pointed out, the Allies used various political tactics to counter the threat of a

breakaway alternative governments in the north<sup>5</sup> and this was certainly one of them. It is clear that the Allies did not want the CLNP in Udine to organise the purge of Fascists and Republicans. There were no doubt other motives; for example, the People's Court represented an alternative authority which the Allies perceived as a direct challenge to their own power.

The term Legal Officer or legal expert was used in Allied documentation, but it is worth asking how familiar AMG officers were with Italian law. In the case of Udine, evidence shows that even when Legal Officers were dealing with Allied Military Government law in the shape of the AMG proclamations, there were serious mistakes made. The cases brought against Italians by Legal Officers often make perplexing reading: for example, seven children appeared before an AMG Court in August 1945 and were given jail sentences by Lieutenant Hemsted in Cividale for having 'played games' with a discarded pistol (without ammunition) that the boys had found in the wreck of German truck. AMG files did not even contain an arrest report and the boys were so young that they had to be brought into court by their parents.<sup>6</sup> This is but one of the cases which suggest that the judgement of Legal Officers was sometimes dubious.

In any case, the CLNP broadsheet, *Libertà*, announced that the closure of the *Tribunale del popolo* was of a purely technical nature in that no further trials could be expected until local judges had consulted with government officials on the subject of *epurazione*. It is worth noting that the original article for publication, 'Giustizia', written by the president of the CLNP, Luigi Cossatini, promised that all collaborators would be brought to justice. However, this promise to the people of Udine was censored by Major C.E. Keysell, the provincial Legal Officer, and did not appear in the published version<sup>7</sup> which suggests that the Allies were not fully committed to punishing local Fascists and Republicans.

Although the *Tribunale del popolo* adjudicated only one case before the British abolished it, the court deserves attention because it is a rare example of the system of justice created by the legal experts of the Resistance movement being put into practice. In his study of the purge of Republicans, the German historian Hans Woller has suggested that the People's Court in Udine was an example of rough justice in a Resistance tribunal.<sup>8</sup> Yet there is little evidence in the AMG archives that



the CLNP intended to use the court for a radical purge of Republicans and it is possible to offer a more charitable interpretation.

Evidence from the AMG files shows that the *Tribunale del popolo* was not established exclusively by the Communist Party or left-wing partisans. The legitimacy of the court was furnished by a decree of the CLNP which represented the political parties of the Resistance, and the military wing of the movement, the *Corpo Volontari della Libertà* (CVL) and included other organisations representing various groups in society: workers, peasants, young people and women. The CLNP established a number of commissions which were to discuss post-war problems, including a *Commissione di giustizia* which focussed on the purge. People who were on CLNP commissions had not necessarily taken part in the Resistance; it was seen as more important that they should be experts in their field. It is therefore clear that the *Tribunale del popolo* was not a revolutionary court in any accepted sense.

On the contrary, evidence suggests that the CLNP hoped the court would be a stabilising force in a period of great social turmoil following the sudden and unexpected collapse of the German armed forces and the RSI. According to the chief legal expert of the CLNP, the *Tribunale del popolo* was established to satisfy popular demand for justice for the victims of months of civil war and anarchy, and in establishing a People's Court, the CLNP, and in particular the CVL, actively dissuaded renegade partisans from taking the law into their own hands. In short, the People's Court pre-empted summary trials and executions by Resistance members in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation.<sup>9</sup> This explains why the Catholic newspaper, *Il Nuovo Friuli*, which was normally deeply hostile to the purging process, fully supported the establishment of a People's Court.<sup>10</sup> It is difficult to believe that the court had a revolutionary colour in that it was modelled on the old Assize Court which been abolished by the Fascists in 1930. It is perhaps testimony to the fairness of the trials that Carlo Bertodo, a respectable magistrate who had served in the local High Court during the Fascist period, and who went on to become Questore of Udine, presided over the *Tribunale del popolo*.<sup>11</sup>

Also, it should be noted that the first defendant, Odorico Borsatti, was tried according to the penal code that had been established under Fascism because the new *epurazione* laws only arrived in the province with AMG.<sup>12</sup> A popular jury of ten men

(*assessori*) were chosen the day before the trial from a CLN list of thirty jurors, most of whom were white-collar workers (*impiegati*), not factory workers or peasants. The list included only six people who claimed to be partisans, three of whom were from Communist brigades and could plausibly be described as party cadres.<sup>13</sup> What my research in the AMG files demonstrates is that the Allied authorities themselves had solid evidence that the *Tribunale del popolo* was not a revolutionary court fomenting violence and public disorder; rather its officials and jury members represented a fair cross-section of local society. That a significant part of the public reacted to the closure of the *Tribunale del popolo* by protesting to the authorities suggests that the court had been popular. On 9 May the Allies realised from Questore reports that the closure of the People's Court had aroused public protest and that there was a serious possibility of dissent if collaborators were not brought to trial. The Allies concluded that that it was important to establish the Special Assize Court immediately to allay ill-feeling.<sup>14</sup>

Nationally, the legal process to purge Republicans was organised into two sections which dealt with collaboration and other war-related crimes. Firstly, the Italian government passed a decree, DLL 249, establishing Special Assize Courts (*Corte straordinarie d'assise*) for the provinces which had been occupied by the Germans, a decree which was approved by the Allied Control Commission on 25 April 1945. The Special Assize Courts were 'special' in that they were established to deal with the specific crime of collaboration (*collaborazione politica or collaborazione militare*) to the detriment of the armed forces of the Italian state—that is, the anti-Fascist Resistance movement, according to article 5 of the Decree DLL 159 of 27 July 1944.

Secondly, a commission (*Commissione di epurazione*) was supposed to investigate the backgrounds of state officials and suspended those who had collaborated with the Germans, including local officials who had been members of the *Partito fascista repubblicano* (PFR) or who had been appointed in the period of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic (RSI). Historians have often defined the work of Special Assize Courts in punishing collaborators and the perpetrators of serious war-related crimes as a purge, but this is somewhat misleading: in actual fact only the

*Commissione di epurazione* was technically purging Republicans from public institutions and positions of power within society.

It should be noted that, at local level, the purge was limited to the crime of collaboration after 8 September 1943 and therefore people involved in war-related crimes in the period 1940-43 were never prosecuted. The reason was that the Allies believed the Fascist regime to be fundamentally different from the RSI in that the latter was specifically created to collaborate with the German armed forces in Italy. Of course, as Luigi Ganapini has noted, not all Republicans were combatants imbued with fanaticism and racism.<sup>15</sup> As De Felice has insisted, it is wrong to tar all RSI adherents with the same brush.<sup>16</sup> Dianella Gagliani is right to point out that rallying to the RSI in Autumn 1943 after Victor Emanuel and Badoglio fled Rome was very different from adhesion in the spring and summer of 1944 when Nazi violence had intensified and widened to include the civilian population.<sup>17</sup> In any case, most of those who appeared at the Special Assize Court had taken part in the latter period of the RSI, in April-November 1944.

With regard to war-related crimes in the period 1940-43, Alberto Buvoli has demonstrated that the Italian army in Yugoslavia carried out mass deportations, executions and the destruction of villages in anti-partisan operations that were similar to those of the German armed forces.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Claudio Pavone has written that in Venezia Giulia anti-partisan operations involved the execution of Slovene partisans by the Italian army.<sup>19</sup> Even so, the purge did not deal with the army officers and men who had committed such war-related crimes. Therefore it is important to note that the way the purge was carried out meant that ordinary Italians did not have to come to terms with the Fascist past but only with war-related crimes during the period of German occupation.

According to an AMG document, one reason why AMG was determined to establish Special Assize Courts in Udine and other provinces was that Allied officers hoped that these courts in northern Italy would prevent some of the criticisms that had hitherto been made of Military Government in southern and central Italy, namely the Allies' perceived 'weakness in dealing with Fascists and collaborators'.<sup>20</sup>

In this chapter, I will refer to members of the RSI as Republicans, not Republican Fascists for reasons of clarity. The CLNP press popularized the term

Fascist to refer to any member of the RSI and Allied documents also use the term 'Fascists' or 'neo-fascist' to refer to RSI members. In practice, however, Republicans, especially local government officials, never explicitly referred to themselves as Fascists, a term used only by their political opponents.

#### THE SPECIAL ASSIZE COURT IN UDINE

A study of the purging process in Friuli published in the mid-1970s found that, whereas the courts in Udine had effectively punished collaborators, the Appeal Court in Milan later quashed most of the tough sentences that had been handed down to Republicans.<sup>21</sup> The Special Assize Courts consisted of a president and four lay judges (*giudici popolari*). The president of the Assize Court in Udine was nominated by the president of the Appeal Court in Venice which ensured that only magistrates with long experience were chosen to take part in the purge. The president of the Assize Court was at least of equal status to a *consigliere* at the Appeal Court. On 10 May the legal team in Udine applied for permission from Eighth Army HQ to establish an Assize Court for local Italian officials and Republicans who had collaborated with the German armed forces.<sup>22</sup> Some three weeks later, on the morning of 7 June, the Special Section of the Assize Court sat for the first time amid much fanfare. Brigadier General J.K. Dunlop, the Regional Legal Officer, said at the inaugural ceremony that reconstruction could only be based on justice—the judiciary of a state mirrored the nation and true democracy meant a free justice system in a free nation. The occasion was heralded in the CLNP press as an important event.<sup>23</sup> In reality, at this point in time, the Allies were planning to abandon the country within about six weeks<sup>24</sup> and therefore AMG officials did not expect to oversee the purge. The German historian, Hans Woller has written that in Como, Udine and other northern cities, Prefects, Questori, and Fascist leaders appeared before the Assize Courts,<sup>25</sup> but this was not in fact the case in Udine at least.

In Udine, the story is different. The first trial at the Special Section of the Assize Court was of a very public figure—Federico Valentinis, the former editor of the local broadsheet, *Il Popolo*, who had been arrested and detained on 1 May. Valentinis was accused of collaboration with the enemy and reporting false news

items on the Resistance movement in particular and the war in general. Valentinis admitted that he had been a Fascist Republican Party member but denied having had any particular ties to the Nazis.

What happened at the first trial deserves attention as Valentinis ran the printing presses of the Fascist Republican Party broadsheet, and edited and published a great deal of Nazi propaganda, including articles that officially condoned and inspired anti-Semitism. During the trial, however, the court heard evidence that the misinformation and propaganda in the broadsheet had had little if any discernable impact on its readers and that the items of Nazi propaganda were in any case unattributed, making it difficult to prove that Valentinis had written any of them himself. Important people in Udine appeared at Valentinis' trial and reiterated the claims of his defence that the allegations were untrue. Some went further and claimed that Valentinis had used his position as editor to save them from imprisonment or deportation while others testified that he had aided partisans and Jews in escaping arrest. According to detailed guidelines on how to interpret the new laws on *epurazione*, Valentinis should have been sentenced to at least ten years in prison, but the judge accepted the statements of a number of witnesses at face value and found Valentinis guilty only of the minor charge of indirect collaboration and he received a third off for what the judge termed 'good deeds during the Resistance period'.

However, it should also be noted that Valentinis was very different from most collaborators who appeared before the Assize Court for war-related crimes in that he was not guilty of violence against the Resistance, but rather of publishing Nazi propaganda in *Il Popolo* which most partisans had dismissed as a Fascist rag. The vast majority of defendants in Udine were young men from the rank and file of the RSI armed forces, people who were working class and had mostly received only a very elementary education.

This is most clearly revealed in the case of the second defendant to appear at the Assize Court, a Republican, Giuseppe Cocolo, who was accused of murdering twenty partisans and civilians and of spying for the German armed forces. Cocolo was only sixteen when he appeared before magistrates and was sentenced to life in prison. A third defendant, Nerino Cerovaz who was twenty-three years old, was



sentenced to death for espionage. Given the kind of ordinary soldiers of the Republican Guard who appeared before the Special Assize Court, it is difficult to believe Woller's conclusion that the court was used in a general class struggle.<sup>26</sup>

It is worthwhile mentioning that, although the Special Assize Court was a 'special' court, its judge was an ordinary Assize judge and the court was therefore subordinate to the Procuratore Generale at the Court of Cassation. This meant that those who were found guilty of war crimes at the Special Assize Courts had the right to appeal to a Special Section of the Court of Cassation in Brescia, and, of course, the lawyers of Valentinis sent a swift appeal to this court by air from Treviso airport immediately after his conviction. As in many other cases, the Special Section of the Court of Cassation thought that Valentinis had been punished too severely and overturned the decision of the judges in Udine: Valentinis received a very mild punishment for war-related crimes, and was released on 1 June 1946 after serving less than a year in prison.<sup>27</sup> It is perhaps telling that the president of the Special Section of the Court of Cassation, sitting in Brescia, had previously raised doubts about the jurisdiction of the Special Assize Courts to try army officers and men who would normally have appeared before military tribunals.<sup>28</sup>

According to a report by Carlo Bertodo, who had by then become the Questore in Udine, most local people criticized the slow progress of the Special Assize Court in dealing with cases of collaboration and there was profound disenchantment with the small number of trials.<sup>29</sup> Reports about the public mood in Udine were similar to the situation in Naples where, according to an article by Paolo De Marco, the population's initial sympathy towards AMG rapidly declined in the aftermath of liberation.<sup>30</sup> Hans Woller has suggested that the Special Assize Courts showed no clemency in initial trials and that this is demonstrated by what happened at Genoa, Rovigo, Como and many other northern cities. Woller goes on to add that many of these sentences were legally dubious as the courts issued sentences because they were unwilling or unable to disinterest themselves from public pressure.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the Resistance authorities in Udine claimed that the public gallery of the Special Assize Court was also filled with Republican sympathisers, and, on at least one occasion, lorries brought RSI supporters to the courtroom so that they could cheer an SS major who was on trial. At about this time, the Catholic Church was

holding public memorials for Republicans who had been killed during the war, and the Resistance leaders believed that both the Questura and the Prefect were doing little to defend emerging democracy.<sup>32</sup>

AMG Public Safety officers had the impression that public order was remarkably good in town given the turbulent events of the aftermath of war and Liberation. Even the Christian Democrat press, *Il Nuovo Friuli*,—a broadsheet that seized every opportunity to carry stories of Communist barbarity—reported that there had been remarkably few episodes of violence and revenge against local collaborators and Republicans.<sup>33</sup> Certainly I have found no evidence that any of the Fascist or Republican leaders were shot by partisans, after the Liberation. It is worthwhile noting that even British Intelligence reports, which were anti-Communist, never mention incidents of Resistance violence in the immediate aftermath of the partisan insurrection.<sup>34</sup>

There is some evidence, however, that the new Christian Democrat Prefect, Agostino Candolini, was reluctant to assist the local Public Prosecutor in preparing the cases for the court; for example, Udine was one of the largest provinces in Italy and there were two Special Sections of the Assize Court in Pordenone and Tolmezzo, but the Prefettura refused to provide transport for investigating magistrates. The Procuratore Generale and the AMG legal officer, Major W.D. Stump, repeatedly asked Candolini to supply transport.<sup>35</sup> AMG officers themselves did not take any practical measures to improve matters. The Prefect did eventually provide two cars,<sup>36</sup> but the vehicles were not roadworthy due to their worn tyres, and the magistrates of the Assize Court had to go on borrowing private cars to carry out investigations.<sup>37</sup> It is clear that, without proper transport, and with a tiny staff in the Public Prosecutor's Office, the investigating magistrates were unable to gather much evidence that collaborators had also been directly involved in crimes like murder, torture and the massacres and atrocities of the *rastrellamenti*. Therefore, investigating magistrates did not discover, collect and bring evidence to the Public Prosecutor to support the accusation of collaboration and, as a result, cases presented at the Special Assize Court were often weak or lacking in evidence.

In a legal report of 26 July on the local Assize Courts, Major W.D. Stump described the courts as an 'apparent failure' and wrote that the underlying reason for

the slow progress of the Special Assize Court was not the transport problem, but the fact that 'obviously the job cannot be done by sessions of one day each week.'<sup>38</sup>

In theory, the presence of four lay judges, who were chosen from a pool put forward by the CLNP, meant that ordinary Italians had an important role in deciding on how Republican collaborators were to be punished. In practice, however, it was the investigating magistrates who had a crucial role in the trials at the Special Assize Courts. The Public Prosecutor gathered evidence and decided on the charges. Trial records from the Special Assize Court in Udine demonstrate that the Public Prosecutor invariably charged Republicans and collaborators with the crime of collaboration, rather than with violent crimes such as rape, torture and murder, of which they were also guilty; for example, Giovanni Vidoni was accused only of collaboration, even though it emerged from the Public Prosecutor's investigations that the people who Vidoni denounced were murdered by the Cossacks as a direct result of his accusations.<sup>39</sup> In most cases, the Public Prosecutor was reluctant to put Republicans on trial for crimes other than collaboration. It is true that collaboration was a serious crime in that the minimum sentence was ten years in prison and the maximum sentence was the death penalty, but, by ignoring the additional violent crimes, the Public Prosecutor was not presenting a strong case for a custodial sentence or revealing the true brutality of the war.

Moreover, as the Public Prosecutor refused to investigate the more serious crimes committed by Republicans—massacres, murder, rape, torture, arson—there was little evidence gathered by the magistrates and cases against collaborators were often incomplete and therefore dropped. In the light of this, it can be said that the brutality of many collaborators was unpunished. For example, in the case of Antonio Bressan, a member of the RSI battalion «Volontari fascisti friulani», who had participated in numerous atrocities and was personally responsible for executing innocent civilians, several witnesses testified that he had inflicted torture on partisans, including putting a steel wire round victims' testicles, and tightening it with a piece of wood. Despite this he was found guilty only of collaboration not violent crimes.

In reality, the Public Prosecutor and investigating magistrates were themselves part of the problem. The Public Prosecutor and investigating magistrates

in Udine all belonged to the local judiciary which had served under the Fascist regime. As an elite group within the judicial system, the judges had utilized Fascist laws and their powers of arrest to persecute anti-Fascists and suppress democratic opposition to the regime. One of the paradoxes of the purge process was that there was no purge of the judiciary itself. As Pier Giuseppe Murgia, among others, has pointed out, this meant that the Special Assize Courts were in the hands of a judiciary which was deeply conservative, if not Fascist, in its approach to the law and the role of the courts.<sup>40</sup>

It is worth looking at the attitude of the Public Prosecutor in Udine, under the direction of the Procurator General at the Appeal Court in Venice, which prepared the cases for the Special Section of the Assize Court. The Public Prosecutor later wrote in 1947 that 'any episode of hostility towards the Resistance movement was not presented in a calm way by either the witnesses or victims [of war-related crimes] but rather their hatred towards the defendants magnified the crimes out of all proportion.'<sup>41</sup> In another letter, written in 1946, the public prosecutor argued that:

there were many accusations, but little evidence, and only espionage could be proven. The death sentence was passed in a period when public emotions and the desire for revenge were very strong. Later defendants, who were found guilty of similar crimes, received much lighter sentences [from the Special section of the Assize Court in Udine].<sup>42</sup>

It can be argued that there was little evidence because investigating magistrates had failed to investigate crimes properly. In addition, it is worthwhile remembering that much of the public anger was the result of the horrific disclosures of the Special Assize Court trials themselves because the bestiality of Nazi and RSI terror had previously been kept out of the press. The atrocities perpetrated by the RSI during the German occupation of Udine—culminating in the *rastrellamenti* discussed in Chapter Six—were of a nature and scale which had hitherto never been seen in Friuli and the gruesome details of war-related crimes naturally provoked horror. The American historian Roy Palmer Domenico has correctly written that defendants at the Assize Courts came mainly from the Black Brigades or the *Guardia nazionale repubblicana* of the RSI.<sup>43</sup> In actual fact they were guilty of violent crimes as well as collaboration though in most cases only the latter was prosecuted.



Also, decisions at the Special Assize Court were appealed at the Court of Cassation in Milan, the highest court in the land, whose tribunal of career judges were even more conservative than the lay judges of the Special Assize Court. At the Court of Cassation an appeal procedure involved a complete retrial of the case rather than a review of some aspect of the trial. Hence the Court of Cassation had the power to make a very different assessment of the facts. The Court of Cassation constituted the final appeal court and many of the decisions of the Special Assize Court were annulled or the cases were transferred to another Assize Court for retrial. Antonio Bressan, for example, was sentenced to twenty years in prison by the Special Assize Court in Udine, but, on appeal, the Court of Cassation found that there was lack of evidence, annulled the verdict and ordered the case to be retried at the Special Court of Assize in Padua. Therefore, it is worthwhile noting that many of the sentences of the Special Assize Court were later heavily reduced or annulled on appeal by the Court of Cassation.

Moreover, because the judicial system was particularly slow, by the time most of the cases in Udine reached the Court of Cassation an amnesty for political prisoners had already been passed by the government of the new Italian Republic in June 1946. The Court of Cassation had the power to grant an amnesty to those accused of political crimes without consulting with the judge at the Special Assize Court.

One reason the purge in Udine was so slow was the sheer size of the task facing the local judiciary. The Public Prosecutor's Office in Udine had only seven magistrates and five lawyers to cope with some 1,300 Republican trials involving more than 1,500 prisoners held in jails throughout the province. Some Republicans were still free in Udine, including members of the Questura who had handed over hostages to the Germans. The Public Prosecutor made such slow progress in the screening of political prisoners that the local court was only able to deal with one case a week.

In this situation, the Regional Legal Officer felt that prisoners should either be charged or released as tension was mounting within prisons. As the Regional Legal Officer Willmer commented, the solution was to employ more staff to assist the Public Prosecutor. He thought that an important factor in the poor progress of the



courts was that 'no one seems to know which legal authority was actually responsible for screening people who have been imprisoned for war-related crimes'.<sup>44</sup>

Nor did Allied occupation make the work of Italian magistrates more easy. Until the Italian legal authorities in Udine had received permission from the Eighth Army to establish the Special Section of the Assize Court in Udine, investigating magistrates could do little about a purge since *epurazione* laws had strict time limits for investigations and trials. Evidence shows that AMG Udine requested permission to implement General Order 35 with a telegram to AMG Venezia Region on 15 May 1945, but permission was not granted by AMG until 25 June, an unnecessary delay.<sup>45</sup>

#### THE COMMISSIONE DI EPURAZIONE

AMG General Order 35 was an Allied proclamation which was intended to purge former Republicans from important positions within society. The *Commissione di epurazione* was supposed to deal with the legacy of the RSI and German occupation. In particular, the Commission was to suspend Republicans who had been part of the RSI armed forces and had taken part in the *rastrellamenti* and the execution of partisans. People who were not officials or soldiers of the RSI but who had collaborated with the RSI or the Germans could also be suspended. As Claudio Pavone has noted, many ordinary Italians claimed that they had been coerced into collaborating with the Nazis,<sup>46</sup> but the commission was supposed to ignore such pleas. The work of the epuration commissions has been far less studied than that of the Special Assize Courts.

Individuals who were to be screened by the Commission had to complete a detailed questionnaire (*una scheda*) which outlined their background, career and Republican Party activities. A key point in the Resistance press was that Communist partisans would not disarm whilst Republicans remained in positions of power, and some partisans were reported to have said that they would not relinquish their weapons until there was evidence of a real commitment to *epurazione* viewed as an integral part of post-war reconstruction.<sup>47</sup>

Towards the end of May the Prefect and Resistance leaders put forward nominations for the Epuration Commission which were supposed to have three investigating judges (*magistrati*) and thirteen members from the six political parties which made up the anti-Fascist alliance, the CLNP. It was soon apparent, however, that the Prefect, Agostino Candolini, was somewhat reluctant to form the Commission and the Allies had to insist that the Prefect comply with the orders as soon as possible.<sup>48</sup>

AMG files reveal that police investigations by Questura police officers—some of whom were themselves under suspicion of having committed war-related crimes—resulted in several nominations being rejected by AMG on the grounds that the people had a ‘criminal record’: they had been arrested by the police authorities for anti-Fascist activities during the Fascist period. By using criminal records from the Fascist and Republican period, the Questura police officers, who really assumed the role of liaison officers between the Italian establishment and AMG, probably manipulated reality and were able to convince Allied officers that people with an anti-Fascist past were unsuitable candidates to sit on the Epuration Commission. It seems astonishing that AMG officers excluded nominations for the Epuration Commission on the basis that individuals had been arrested during the Fascist period for their political beliefs, but AMG documents demonstrate that this is indeed the case. It is in fact the central weakness of the purge. Candidates were carefully chosen by the Provincial Commissioner to ensure that they did not have radical ideas about removing Republicans and Fascists.

For example, when the Prefect submitted the list of nominations for the Epuration Commission, the names of those ‘persons of a “Red” persuasion’ as the Provincial Legal Officer Major C.E. Keysell described them, were rejected by Allied Military Government on the grounds that they had an anti-Fascist past. In November 1945 one member of the Epuration Commission had to resign through ill health and the Prefect sent two nominations to replace him: Guerino Paviotti and Gino Mauro. Paviotti was a cobbler by trade, thirty-seven years old, and a member of the Communist Party. In 1934 Paviotti had been sentenced to four years imprisonment for anti-Fascist activities. Two years of the sentence had been suspended as a result of an amnesty granted to persons condemned for this offence and he had been

released in 1936. The following year, the Fascists themselves had revoked the sentence. However, Paviotti was rejected by William Crago, the Provincial Legal Officer because Paviotti was not 'of the calibre required for this position'. The other candidate, Gino Mauro, was also a Communist but he had no criminal record and was 'apparently a good character' according to the police. Mauro was rejected because of his age—he was twenty-one—which in the eyes of the Legal Officer made him 'too young and inexperienced'. At the end of the report, Crago asked the Provincial Commissioner to invite the CLNP to forward a 'more suitable candidate'.<sup>49</sup> In this case, it is clear that the candidates for the Epuration Commission were rejected by AMG because they were members of the local section of the Communist Party. As Ellwood has pointed out, no analysis of the reconstruction period in Italy should ignore the international context which cannot be separated from Allied plans for reconstruction.<sup>50</sup> De Felice has gone further and suggested that, in the context of Cold War alignments, the confrontation between Fascism and anti-Fascism was replaced by a confrontation between Communism and anti-Communism.<sup>51</sup> The extent to which a real 'communist threat' existed is debateable, however. Marxist historian Giampaolo Gallo, for example, has insisted that it was only during the period September to October 1944, that the local section of the Communist Party had revolutionary intentions and that, by the end of the war, the Communists were fully committed to the cross-party alliance of the CLNP.<sup>52</sup>

Also, it should be remembered that not only were police officers of the PS deeply antagonistic to communism and socialism, but that the personal files of the Questura police officers themselves were to be investigated by members of the Epuration Commission and therefore they had a personal interest in discrediting members who were anti-Fascist. In any case, it is clear that the Questura had an important role in shaping the Epuration Commission and as a result the Commission had a very conservative mould.

Mario Boschian, a Christian Democrat judge, eventually presided over the local *commissione di epurazione*, which included six other members chosen from the political parties of the CLNP. In addition to Mario Boschian (Christian Democrat Party), there was Ruggero Tresca (Action Party) the vice president, Tiziano Pessa (Socialist Party), a lawyer Carlo Piussi (Liberal Party), Antonio Feruglio

(Communist Party), Claudio Cernuschi (A former partisan from the Christian Democrat brigade, the Brigata Osoppo Friuli), and Lirusso Evangelista (a former partisan from the Communist Brigata Garibaldi Friuli). Soon after his nomination, Lirusso had to go into hospital and so was replaced.<sup>53</sup> Its members were quite unfamiliar with the Allied legislation, Order 35, and therefore, to aid them in their task, AMG provided a translation of the proclamation and a set of guidelines for the Commission.<sup>54</sup> In the last week of June, the Commission began meeting in the *Casa dei Littori*, a large building which had been the provincial Headquarters of the local PNF. It is perhaps telling that the Commission, which was supposed to have an important role in purging society of Fascist elements did not have the technical means to carry out investigations: it had no car to begin its interviews and only one typewriter to record its findings. Meanwhile, on 26 June, copies of the proclamation Order 35 were posted around the town, and, according to a report by the Questore, there was great public interest in the Epuration Commission: people crowded around the notices to read the legislation while others discussed its implications.<sup>55</sup>

The Epuration Commission gave each member responsibility for investigating a specific profession and requested the personal files of state employees from the various institutions.<sup>56</sup> Commission members examined the most notorious cases which, in the month of June alone, resulted in the suspension of seventy-five individuals on the grounds of collaboration, including the Director of Education for the province (*Il Provveditore agli Studi*). Not only did the Commission want to purge Republicans, but they also wanted to examine the personal files of those who applied for the vacancies to ensure that former Republicans did not replace those who had been suspended for war-related crimes.<sup>57</sup> One Questura report commented that people were dismayed to learn that Germans who had worked for the Todt Organisation were now employed in private companies.<sup>58</sup>

The Epuration Commission began with the police officers and staff of the Questura. A report on public mood concluded that the vast majority of people in Udine wanted to see a thorough purge of the police officers of the Questura.<sup>59</sup> It is curious that the Questore himself, Carlo Bertodo, asked the Epuration Commission to begin with the police services. Documents in the AMG reveal Carlo Bertodo's real motive. According to an AMG report, he had made some sort of informal agreement

with the president of the Commission which precluded an investigation of war-related crimes committed by police officers. The significance of this action, however, apparently did not escape other members of the Commission who, after investigating accusations, decided to suspend all the police officers in the Questura and immediately arrest two of them.<sup>60</sup> Bertodo accused the Commission of being highly politicised and claimed that the allegations against police officers were unfounded. However, another AMG Legal Officer, Major W.D. Stump, carried out his own investigation and in a report to AMG Venezie Region concluded that the police officers in the Questura had committed war-related crimes and that the suspension was wholly justified.<sup>61</sup>

One of the problems the Commission encountered was that during the last phase of the Resistance period, some partisans had issued so-called certificates of merit to Republicans entitling them to future reward or gratitude because they had been of service to the Resistance. Many Republicans believed that they were now exempt from punishment or suspension from office because they had contributed to the Resistance. For example, when the Commission decided to suspend the police in the Questura, one officer, Antonio D'Onofrio, produced a certificate of merit from a prominent Socialist stating that D'Onofrio shown anti-Fascist sympathies during the period of German occupation.

One of the first public institutes the Epuration Commission investigated was the Post Office, which had handled important German communications. After examining the files of postal workers, the Commission concluded in July that thirty-two clerks and eight officials were to be suspended. The Director of the Post Office objected to the findings of the Commission and some evidence of the thinking behind his objections is contained in a letter. According to the Director, his employees had not been staunch Republicans, but rather ordinary people who had been deluged with Fascist propaganda. The Director insisted that these individuals had never been committed to the values of the RSI and were in fact 'valuable employees', and that staff shortages would cause inevitable disruption to postal services. In short, the postmaster urged the Committee not to purge the local Post Office because it would do a great deal of harm to an institution which was important for reconstruction.<sup>62</sup> It is worth noting that the Post Office was involved in the



compilation of electoral lists during this period and perhaps this was taken into consideration by the Commission.<sup>63</sup> The Post Office is but one example of a state institution which assured the Commission that, not only were its employees not Republicans and therefore relatively unimportant figures in the RSI, but that any sort of purge would merely strike a blow against the institution itself with possible consequences for reconstruction.

The CLNP press appealed for victims to come forward and testify at the Special Section of the Assize Court against Republicans and other collaborators who were accused of war-related crimes.<sup>64</sup> Although the CLNP did not officially form its own *commissione di epurazione*, it nevertheless established a committee to gather information about Republicans and other collaborators so that the individuals could be denounced to the Special Section of the Assize Court. It is probable that the CLNP became involved in gathering its own incriminating evidence because Resistance leaders had little faith in the new powers of the Epuration Committee, and the Resistance representatives were unwilling to trust officers of the Questura and carabinieri, presumably because they were not using their police powers to investigate and arrest known Fascists and Republicans. Again, the Questura of Udine showed nothing but contempt for the CLN committees and pointed to the anti-Fascist activities of its members in an effort to discredit the incriminating evidence that the committees were gathering.

AMG showed no enthusiasm for the CLNP committees and, in fact, in November 1945, Lt. William H. Crago, an Allied legal expert, warned a committee that Italian government officials had recently taken a much more liberal attitude towards war-related crimes involving Republicans and therefore the committee had to be cautious about accusing people. At about this time, the Questura supplied Crago with a file on Daniele Piedmonte, the president of a CLNP committee which was investigating war-related crimes committed by Republicans, who had apparently been imprisoned for what the Fascists termed 'criminal behaviour', that is anti-Fascism.<sup>65</sup> This kind of Questura involvement and their willingness to inform the Allies about individuals had a marked effect on the purge in that it devalued the work of the CLNP.

It is worth pointing out that the Epuration Commission did not follow the Allies' instructions and in fact suspended low grade state employees first rather than focus on important officials. An Allied report on epuration returns criticised the Commission for starting with the least important cases, the so-called 'deferred cases' of Republicans in low-grade jobs, and not the high-grade officials in the RSI, who were listed as 'urgent' cases. According to Major W.D. Stump, the Commissions 'appear generally to have ignored the priorities and to have spent a large proportion of their time in investigating deferred *schede*.'<sup>66</sup> The example of Udine confirms the view of Gian Enrico Rusconi that Republicans with minor roles in the RSI, the so-called 'piccoli fascisti', were disproportionately blamed for Fascism.<sup>67</sup>

However, it is worthwhile pointing out that the vast majority cases were in fact 'deferred cases'. By contrast, the numbers of 'urgent cases' were relatively small and there were serious delays in receiving the personal files for the high-ranking cases. In theory, the Commission was supposed to deal with urgent cases first, but in practice, as the Commission explained to the Allied authorities, especially in rural areas, it was much quicker to go through all files of one institution at a time rather than ask the institution to send in three different sets of files over a period of time.

It is not clear from AMG files what actually became of individuals who were suspended by the Commission, but the figures below show that the purge did not mark a decisive break with the Fascist past.

Table 1.2. Number of purges by the *Commissione di Epurazione*, July-December 1945.<sup>68</sup>

Cases	Urgent	Routine
Investigations completed without taking any measures against persons	112	2559
Persons suspended	28	380
Total number of personal files received	140	2939
Appeals		
Successful appeals against suspension	5	144
Appeals rejected and persons suspended	15	132
Appeals still to be heard	7	95
Total number of appeals	27	371
Suspensions		
Cases without appeals	1	9
Persons actually suspended by board	15	132
Total number of persons suspended	16	141

The immediate cases were senior officials. Routine cases were low-grade officials and deferred cases were the bottom rung, as it were, grade 7. In October, the Provincial Commissioner commenting on the suspension of a Carabinieri Group Commander who had been working for the Allies, wrote that the removal of the Italian police officer who had a Fascist past completely undermined the good work the commander had done in improving carabinieri morale in the aftermath of the war.<sup>69</sup>

## THE PRISON SYSTEM

It is difficult to understand the reluctance of the judiciary to incarcerate more people unless the state of local prisons is borne in mind. In Udine, as elsewhere in Italy, the purge of Republicans was complicated by the fact that prisons were already overflowing with convicts even before the trials had begun. The Resistance forces seized control of the prisons in Udine during the Liberation, not only to release people who had been wrongfully imprisoned by the Nazi and RSI authorities, but also to hold Republicans and other collaborators who were being rounded up by partisans.

There were external factors, however, which made the task extremely difficult. One problem was that the Allies did not consider members of the Fascist armed forces to be prisoners of war, but rather 'members of a surrendered enemy force' that is, collaborators,<sup>70</sup> which meant that Republicans in Italian custody on charges of atrocities and collaboration were to be placed in the local jail, not in prisoner-of-war camps along with German soldiers. Similarly, RSI personnel captured by the British were handed over to the Italian authorities and placed in local jails.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the prisons were soon overflowing with members of the RSI armed forces who had been detained during the Liberation. An Allied report stated bluntly that it was probable that the majority of Republicans would never face trial. Allied troops seemed uninterested in rounding up Republicans, with the notable exception of the Jewish troops from the Eighth Army's Palestine Brigade, who pursued Germans and Republicans, which alarmed AMG who felt their action was tending to upset rather than calm the public.<sup>72</sup>

In any case, by late July 1945, there were some 500 prisoners in Udine town jail awaiting trial at the Special Section of the Assize Court. An Allied report about conditions in the jail stated that most Republicans were held in the town jail for their own protection because of the extent of popular fury against those who had committed war-related crimes against civilians and partisans.<sup>73</sup> In fact another report went further and claimed that some of the more radical elements of the Resistance might attempt an assault on the jail and hence twenty-two carabinieri officers

patrolled the perimeter whilst forty-four wardens kept watch over the prisoners within the compound.<sup>74</sup>

The Allies recognised that, in the climate of political tension, such individuals would probably never be brought to trial and consequently AMG hoped that Republicans would be also classed as ‘surrendered enemy forces’ and given the same status as prisoners of war. In Venice, for example, the Republican Black Brigades had surrendered to partisan commanders on the condition that they would be treated as prisoners of war unless they were guilty of war-related crimes.<sup>75</sup>

I want to draw attention to the conditions in the prison in Udine. Firstly, during the Nazi occupation, the Resistance movement had cursed and reviled the notorious, local jail in Via Spalato and, unsurprisingly, the building, which was a symbol of Nazi terror, had been extensively vandalized during the partisan insurrection. Therefore, some wings of the prison were devoid of rudimentary features such as locks, cell doors, and glass windows. On the other hand, there were very few guards and the prisoners enjoyed considerable liberty within the building not least because there were no locks. The picture is somewhat similar to that of the famous Milanese prison, San Vittore, studied by John Foot.<sup>76</sup> What is remarkable about Udine is that, according to a later report by the Questore, partisans and Republicans managed to live together reasonably well; the prisoners were not isolated on remand and Republicans sang Fascist songs and received many visits from relatives and friends. The provisions, however, were so poor that relatives had to provide the prisoners with food.<sup>77</sup> All these factors help us to understand why the Public Prosecutor’s Office was reluctant to widen investigations into crimes committed during the Resistance period, investigations that would inevitably result in more people being taken into custody.

Another problem was that the Italian authorities had to screen all the prisoners who had been recently jailed by the SS. This explains why more than a month after the town had been liberated, there were still twelve prisoners in jail who had been convicted of crimes by Nazi courts, including four individuals who had been incarcerated by the SS for deserting the German armed forces. As their cases had not been investigated, they languished in prison for crimes that were actually rather commendable.<sup>78</sup>



Prison riots were endemic as a result of local overcrowding and poor conditions. The tension in Udine jail culminated in a mass rebellion of Republican prisoners on November 11 1945. According to a report by the Questore, the guards were overpowered by the convicts who had managed to smuggle weapons into their cells including rifles. Other prisoners armed themselves with metal bars. Some Republicans broke into the prison armoury and handed out twelve rifles and some 400 rounds of ammunition to fellow inmates. Republicans destroyed cells and lighting. The rebellion was so serious that the Italian authorities had to ask the British military to restore order with soldiers and four tanks which surrounded the prison.<sup>79</sup>

The other prisons in the province were also overflowing: the Assize Court of Udine had sections sitting in the towns of Pordenone and Tolmezzo in whose jails there were hundreds of Republicans awaiting trial. A contemporary illustration of the conditions in Udine's jails can be seen in an inspection of Pordenone jail carried out by Joseph Guarini, AMG Regional Prison Officer. Conditions in the prison had no doubt deteriorated during the Nazi occupation. The prison at Pordenone was very old and had rough wooden floors that had not been cleaned recently because the guards had no brooms. The building had a foul odour and was full of vermin. Liberation had led to the capture of many Republicans and collaborators: the jail had a capacity for 100 men and 20 women but in June there were 228 prisoners who had been arrested during the Liberation. The report concluded that the problem of overcrowding could be remedied and conditions greatly improved with a proper screening procedure and the removal of some fifty prisoners.<sup>80</sup>

The Allies attempted to resolve the problem of overflowing prisons by removing some 300 Republicans who had been delivered to town jails in the province and placing them in a new prison camp which had been built by the Fascist regime during the war for the purpose of holding Allied soldiers and ordinary civilians who had been deported by the Italian army during its military campaigns. However this particular camp had never been completed because the regime had enjoyed no military victories and hence had captured relatively few prisoners of war. According to Allied documents, the camp had large modern buildings, was airy and well spaced and could hold an estimated 2,000 inmates. Problems with the camp

began when the Allies allowed thirty partisans to guard the prison, only seven of whom had weapons. The perimeter was unlit and the camp was situated in an area of thick vegetation. Unsurprisingly, there were many escapes from this camp, which discredited the prison system.

It is worthwhile mentioning that after the first few trials, the Special Assize Court had little novelty and, as a result, the purge received much less press coverage. *Libertà*, the Resistance newspaper which had an initial circulation of 24,000 copies and was the most important daily in the town for the period May-December 1945, did cover all the important trials, but its influence as a broadsheet declined in 1946, when a Catholic and Monarchist newspaper group, which launched *Il Messaggero Veneto*, took over control of the printing press and ensured that *Libertà* rolled off the presses after all the morning trains and couriers had left town.<sup>81</sup> *Il Messaggero Veneto* was a Christian Democrat broadsheet which was anti-Communist and concerned with supporting Italian claims to Trieste.<sup>82</sup> The local Catholic press trivialised the role of Republicans on trial and much public attention was directed to the virtues of prominent Republicans. The broadsheet's general message was that it was time to move on from *epurazione*. For example, in hostility to the trial of the former PFR leader, Mario Cabai, the *Messaggero Veneto* focussed on his outstanding military record, patriotism, anti-German stance, and some shadowy wartime links with Christian Democrat partisans, no doubt of an anti-Communist nature.

On 22 June 1946, there was a government amnesty for all the prisoners who had been jailed by the Special Assize Courts (*Amnistia e indulto per reati comuni, politici e militari*).<sup>83</sup> Palmiro Togliatti, the Communist Party leader, described the amnesty as a gesture of clemency that would end the social upheaval in society.<sup>84</sup> However, as Claudio Pavone has remarked, it was somewhat grotesque in that it allowed the Court of Cassation to free Republicans who had tortured partisans.<sup>85</sup> This effectively marked the end of the punishment of Republicans and collaborators as the amnesty released the vast majority of convicts, including Mario Cabai and the director of *Il Popolo*, Federico Valentini. Only a few Republicans who were guilty of particularly notorious murders were refused the benefit of the amnesty. Thus, the vast majority of trials that were still to be heard were suspended as a result.

In conclusion, it can be said that the trials at the Special Assize Court neglected the fact that Republicans and collaborators were also common criminals who had committed violent crimes during the Resistance period. This is most clearly revealed in the details which emerged from the trials at the Special Assize Court. The local investigating magistrates and the Public Prosecutor's Office rarely prosecuted violent crimes, preferring to put Republicans on trial for the political crime of collaboration. It is true that the tiny number of staff in the local Public Prosecutor's Office was totally inadequate for the purpose, but the result was that the cases presented at the Special Assize Court in Udine were far from complete.

One of the underlying causes of the failure to prosecute violent crimes was the situation in Udine's prisons. The case of Udine shows that the reluctance of the Public Prosecutor to arrest more people and widen investigations is best understood in the context of a prison system which was already overflowing with urgent cases. Thus, the case of Udine only confirms the picture given by other historians like Palmer Domenico that the purge in Italy was incomplete and ineffectual.

## Endnotes to Chapter Eight

<sup>1</sup> David W. Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985), 238

<sup>2</sup> John Foot, 'The tale of San Vittore: prisons, politics, crime and Fascism in Milan' in *Modern Italy* 3 (1), (1998), 40.

<sup>3</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/128, Condensed Monthly Report for April 1945, 3 May 1945.

<sup>4</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/ 26 (1 of 4) Defascism June 1944-Dec 1945, Allied Commission circular on epuration, Civil Affairs Section, 10 April 1945.

<sup>5</sup> Ellwood, *Italy 1943-1945*, 238.

<sup>6</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/33 Records, Court Returns, June-December 1945 (Jan. 1946?), Major W.D. Stump to Headquarters Venezia Region AMG on legal cases for review, 30 August 1945.

<sup>7</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/128 (1 of 2) Legal Office, AMG Udine Province, Italian Courts, Special Court of Assize May-Sept 1945 (Oct 1945-Jan 1946), Major C.E. Keysell, Provincial Legal Officer, to Cossatini, President of the CLNP, 8 May 1945.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Woller, *I conti con fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia 1943-1948* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 409. The original German title of the work is *Die Abrechnung mit dem Faschismus in Italien, 1943 bis 1948* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/98, Report on the punishing of Fascists and collaborators by Umberto Zaffagnini, Delegato per la Giustizia del Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale Provinciale, 7 May 1945.

<sup>10</sup> 'Dopo un processo', *Il Nuovo Friuli*, 11 May 1945.

<sup>11</sup> Carlo Bertodo went on to become the Questore in Udine during the period of Allied rule.

<sup>12</sup> Of course, under German occupation, the sanctions against Fascism which had appeared in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* were completely unknown to the CLN in Udine. In fact the Legal Officers of AMG brought the first copies of the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* to the province in May 1945.

<sup>13</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/98, CLNP Lista dei giurati, 1 May 1945.

<sup>14</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/39, Message from AMG Udine to Main HQ Eighth Army, 9 May 1945.

<sup>15</sup> Ganapini, *La Repubblica delle camicie nere*, 253.

<sup>16</sup> Renzo De Felice and Pasquale Chessa, *Rosso e Nero* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi s.r.l., 1995), 117.

<sup>17</sup> Gagliani, *Brigate nere*, 53.

<sup>18</sup> See Alberto Buvoli, 'Il fascismo nella Venezia Giulia e la persecuzione antislava', in Alberto Buvoli (ed.), *Foibe e deportazione* (Udine: IFSML, 1998), 26-45.

<sup>19</sup> Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*, 87.

<sup>20</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/26 Defascism June 1944-December 1944, Confidential Memo from 15<sup>th</sup> Army Group on the security procedure in relation to the Italian Special Courts of Assize, 1 May 1945.

<sup>21</sup> Guido Jesu 'I Processi per collaborazionismo in Friuli', in *Storia contemporanea in Friuli*, 4 (1976), 205-272.

<sup>22</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/26 Defascism (3 of 4) Cypher Message from AMG Venezie Region to AMG Eighth Army Rear, 10 May 1945.

<sup>23</sup> See for example comments in the CLNAI broadsheet, *Libertà*, 7 June 1945.

<sup>24</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/26 Defascism June 1944-Dec 1945 (3 of 4), Brigadier G.R. Upjohn to Rear Admiral Stone on Epuration of Judiciary, 17 July 1945.

<sup>25</sup> Woller, *I conti con fascismo. L'epurazione in Italia 1943-48*, 412.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 569.

<sup>27</sup> ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise. Trial of Federico Valentini, 7 June 1945.

<sup>28</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/128 (2 of 2) Legal Officer, Rear Admiral Stone to Regional Commissioners etc, on the jurisdiction of Special Courts of Assize, 4 June 1945. The president had raised doubts about the jurisdiction of the Special Assize Court with respect to military Tribunals in the case of army officers and men accused of collaboration with the enemy. However, the judiciary eventually decided that the Special Assize Courts would have jurisdiction over army.

<sup>29</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56 Questura di Udine, *Mattinale del Giorno*, 10-11 June 1945,

<sup>30</sup> Paolo De Marco, 'Il difficile esordio del governo militare a Napoli', in *Storia contemporanea*, 136 (1979), 49.

<sup>31</sup> Roy Palmer Domenico, *Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943-48*, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Verbale Seduta del CLNP, 9 November 1945, ISFML.

<sup>33</sup> 'Dopo un processo', *Il Nuovo Friuli*, 11 May 1945.

<sup>34</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/12 Secret SITREP from No.1 Special Force to Main HQ Eighth Army, 4 May 1945.

<sup>35</sup> As the British felt it was necessary to appoint a new prefect. Candolini was appointed by Brigadier J.K. Dunlop, Regional Commissioner on 2 June 1945, but his appointment was backdated to 2 May 1945. See NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/29 Italian officials May-June 1945, Regional Order 510, HQ Venezie Region, 2 June 1945.

<sup>36</sup> In June the British army had captured German vehicles which were not serviceable because they had no roadworthy tyres and it was impossible to obtain spares from Germany. See NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191, Monthly Report Udine Province for July 1945.

<sup>37</sup> Major W.D. Stump to Provincial Commissioner on transportation for Assize Court, 13 September 1945.

<sup>38</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/37 Reports of P.L.O., May-August 1945. Major W.D. Stump to Headquarters Venezie Region, AMG, 26 July 1945. W.D. Stump became Provincial Legal Officer on 20 July 1945 replacing Major Keysell.

<sup>39</sup> Guido Jesu, 'I Processi per collaborazionismo in Friuli', in *Storia contemporanea in Friuli*, 4 (1976), 210.

<sup>40</sup> Pier Giuseppe Murgia, *Il vento del nord. Storia e cronaca del fascismo dopo la resistenza (1945-1950)* (Milan: Sugarco Edizioni, 1975), 113.

<sup>41</sup> ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise, Letter from the public prosecutor to Procuratore Generale Corte di Appello Venezia, 31 December 1947.



- <sup>42</sup> ASU, Archivio della Corte d'Assise, Letter from the public prosecutor to Procuratore Generale Corte di Appello Venezia, in 1946.
- <sup>43</sup> Palmer Domenico, *Italian Fascists on Trial, 1943-48*, 174.
- <sup>44</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/39 Reports on Court of Assize, June-Dec 1945. Regional Legal Officer H. Willmer Venezia Region to Provincial Commissioner Udine, 30 June 1945.
- <sup>45</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/36 Telegram AMG Udine to Regional Legal Officer, 15 May 1945.
- <sup>46</sup> Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*, 25.
- <sup>47</sup> E. Zoratti, 'Ordine, Disciplina, Autorità', *Libertà*, 10 August 1945.
- <sup>48</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/1 Legal Office, Epuration etc. Major C.E. Keysell, Provincial Legal Officer, 29 May 1945. Besides the president, up to 14 citizens could be appointed, 7 or 8 of whom would serve in the other towns where there was an Assize Court, Tolmezzo and Pordenone.
- <sup>49</sup> Ist. Lt. William H. Crago, Jr., Provincial Legal Officer to Colonel Bright on Substitution of Bertossi Valbruno, Member of the Epuration Committee, 21 November 1945.
- <sup>50</sup> D.W. Ellwood, 'L'occupazione alleata e la restaurazione istituzionale', in *Italia contemporanea*, 115 (1974), 41.
- <sup>51</sup> Renzo De Felice, *Rosso e Nero* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1995), 102.
- <sup>52</sup> 'Giampaolo Gallo, 'Note sul Partito comunista italiano e le Garibaldi friulane', in *Resistenza e questione nazionale 1. Atti del convegno Problemi di storia della Resistenza in Friuli, Udine, 5/6/7 novembre 1981* (Udine: IFSML, 1984), 187.
- <sup>53</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/ 26 (1 of 4) Defascism June 1944-Dec 1945, Prefect to H.N. Bright, on the Commissione di Epurazione, 16 June, 1945.
- <sup>54</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/ 26 (1 of 4) Defascism June 1944-Dec 1945. Headquarters Allied Commission, circular on epuration to all commissions, Civil Affairs Section, 10 April 1945.
- <sup>55</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56 Mattinale del Giorno, Questura di Udine, 26 June 1945.
- <sup>56</sup> Feruglio an accountant, was responsible for the courts and the council. Pessa was responsible for schools. Piussi was responsible for the Prefettura. Tresca dealt with the Intendenza di Finanza. Folli dealt with the railway and Lirusso with the post and telegraph office. Cernuschi was responsible for public health services, and Cucchini examined the Questura and the provincial administration. See NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/1, the minutes of the first meeting of Commissione di epurazione, 2 July 1945.
- <sup>57</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/1. Minutes of meeting of Commissione di Epurazione, 27 July 1945.
- <sup>58</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56 Daily Reports, May-October 1945, Mattinale del Giorno, Questura di Udine, 22 July 1945.
- <sup>59</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/56 Daily Reports, May-October 1945, Mattinale del Giorno, 13 August 1945.
- <sup>60</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/143/62 (2 of 2) PSD Questura Policy (June – August 1945) Sept. Oct 1945.
- <sup>61</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/37 Reports of P.L.O.(P.O.L.) May-Aug 1945, Legal Report by W.D. Stump for Month of July, dated 28 July 1945.
- <sup>62</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/1 Legal Officer, Epuration, etc. Amministrazione delle Poste e dei Telegrafi to President of Commissione di Epurazione Udine, 23 July 1945.
- <sup>63</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/3 Legal Office. Election Lists. May-December 1945. Prefect to AMG, 17 September 1945.
- <sup>64</sup> 'Procedimenti in corso presso la Corte Straordinaria d'assise', *Libertà*, 12 July 1945.
- <sup>65</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/1 William H. Crago to H.N. Bright, 23 November 1945.
- <sup>66</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/1 Legal Officer, Epuration, etc. W.D. Stump to Provincial Commissioners on Epuration Returns, 29 August 1945.
- <sup>67</sup> Gian Enrico Rusconi, *Resistenza e postfascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995), 161.
- <sup>68</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/28 Periodic Returns March 1944 December 1945.
- <sup>69</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/191 Monthly Report, Udine Province, Venezia Region, October 1945.
- <sup>70</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/16 Legal Office, Prisons, May-November 1945. Regional Legal Officer, Venezia Region to all Provincial Commissioners, 11 July 1945.



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<sup>71</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/16 Legal Office, Prisons, May-November 1945. Provincial Legal Officer, Major C.E. Keysell, to Ten. Col. Giovanni Piacentini, Comando Corpo Armata, Udine. 12 July, 1945.

<sup>72</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/128/170 Intelligence May 1945 to June 194, Report from CAO Tarvisio, 28 May 1945.

<sup>73</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/26 Defascism, June 1944-Dec 1945 (3 of 4), Cypher Message to HQ ALCOM from AMG Venezie Region undated, unsigned, probably May 1945.

<sup>74</sup> 10300/142/57. Reports of P.L.O. May-August 1945. Legal Report from Major W.D. Stump for the month of July 1945 dated 28 July 1945.

<sup>75</sup> See AMG Proclamation 1, Article VIII, Section 2.

<sup>76</sup> John Foot, 'The tale of San Vittore: prisons, politics, crime and Fascism in Milan', in *Modern Italy* (1998) 3 (1).

<sup>77</sup> Questura Report of 26 November 1945, ACS, MI, DGPS, A.G.R. 1944-46, b.146, f. Udine, sf., Carceri.

<sup>78</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/31 Review of Italian Court Cases, May-June 1945, Colonel H.G. Willmer, Regional Legal Officer AMG Venezie to H.N. Bright, Udine, 11 June 1945. Most of those who were imprisoned by the Nazis were released as German sentences were null and void. Nevertheless, while cases were being investigated to discern whether they were common criminals or political prisoners, people remained in jail because if ordinary criminals were released, they would simply be rearrested on the same charges by AMG police.

<sup>79</sup> Report of rebellion 11 November 1945 by Questore U. Durante, 26 November 1945, MI, DGPS, 1944-46, b.146, f. Udine, sf. Carceri.

<sup>80</sup> NA, RG 331, ACC Italy, 10300/142/16 Legal Office, Prisons, May-November 1945. Joseph Guarini, Regional Prison Officer, to R.P.S.O. Venezie Region on the inspection of Pordenone Jail, Udine province, on 28 June 1945.

<sup>81</sup> Lizzero, *Andrea*, 25.

<sup>82</sup> Diego Carpenedo, *Cronache friulane: la provincia di Udine dal 1945 al 1948* (Udine: La Nuova Base editrice, 2000), 54.

<sup>83</sup> See *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana* (137), 23 June 1946.

<sup>84</sup> See 'Relazione del ministro guardasigilli on. Palmiro Togliatti al Presidente del Consiglio dei ministri sul decreto 22 giugno 1946 n.4 concernente amnistia e indulto per i reati comuni, politici e militari' published in Romano Canosa, *Storia dell'epurazione in Italia* (Milan: Baldini&Castoldi, 1999), 434-9.

<sup>85</sup> Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio storico sulla moralità nella Resistenza*, 436.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has dealt with aspects of the Italian home front during World War Two. It has tried to show just how different the early part of Italy's war was from the later period in terms of the demands made on the home front. As I have demonstrated, the attitudes of local government officials and other authorities need to be seen in the context of the time line of the military events. In the summer of 1940, the first reports of Allied air attacks seemed to confirm that the conflict was on a relatively small scale in comparison to the First World War, and this was therefore not a cause for concern for local authorities. In Udine, one of the consequences of having had only a few air raids in 1940-41 was that most people believed they were quite safe from the dramatic effects of the war. Although it is true that Italy's military weakness was quickly exposed in Greece and North Africa in 1940, it is worthwhile remembering that the position of Hitler's armed forces in Europe was extremely strong in the early part of the war and that, as an ally, Italy was associated with that strength. In many ways, the war of 1940-1941 was just the sort of war the Fascists had expected to fight — a European conflict of limited scope. Certainly, in 1940-1941 the war did not seem to be a conflict that was destined to stretch out into the indefinite future.

The case of Udine demonstrates the importance of the army in the organisation of civil defence. Here the army was largely responsible for air raid precautions and the PNF had at best a very minor role. That said, in the local territorial army, attitudes towards air defence precautions were shaped by the perceived course of the war. This leads to the conclusion that army officers themselves did not consider civil defence a priority in 1940-1941 and therefore made no serious effort to protect non-combatants at home. Similarly, many local government officials did not take air precautions seriously. At the same time, air raid precautions in rural areas were naturally limited because their inhabitants had little training or technology, and although UNPA was a national organisation, its influence within rural communities was nominal. In this respect, MacGregor Knox is correct in stating that national poverty played an important part in limiting the extent of war preparations in Italy.

Fascists at local level were expected to obey orders from Rome but, as I have shown, the regime sent very few Air Defence Inspectors into rural areas to see for themselves whether or not the general population was adequately prepared for air attacks. This thesis has argued that localism was a dominant feature on the home front. As I have shown, some of the people who did not comply with the new wartime regulations were in fact part of the system itself; for example, the Podestàs, UNPA officials, and army officers. This demonstrates the view that while Nazi Germany was victorious, there was little, if any, need for a war effort on the home front.

This local case study has also shown that the lack of bomb shelters was not simply due to organisational incapacity or insulated parochialism, but rather to a widely held belief that the war would be short and victorious and that shelters were consequently not an outright priority. In actual fact, as I have demonstrated, local air defence precautions proved more than adequate for the actual bombing that did take place in the early part of the war, although this was less true in 1943.

From the start of the war, the rural commissions formed within farming communities to report infringements and protect the nation's food supply had an ambivalent attitude towards war economy regulations: the laws were circumvented or bent according to the extent to which local government officials needed to implement them. The natural bias of Podestàs was to favour their local farming community and local interests usually took precedence over national orders. Rural communities particularly resented Fascist attempts to take over the distribution of food and consequently there was much resistance to the *ammassi* campaign. This resistance was not documented by peasants themselves, but by the police and the local Podestàs, usually in remarkably sympathetic terms. Some peasant-farmers were sullenly resentful of increased state intervention, while others sought to undermine the *ammassi* laws, but few were punished for the abuses. The overwhelming majority of peasant-farmers clung to their practices of the past, despite the propaganda and pressure from the PNF and other authorities. Knox has described this as a crippling parochialism of outlook.<sup>1</sup> This thesis suggests that one of the main reasons for

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<sup>1</sup> Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, 28.

Fascism's dismal war effort was the ability of Italians to manipulate the war economy regulations and demands of the home front.

This thesis has also examined the *Repubblica sociale italiana* under German occupation. Recently, some historians and memoirists have offered a more charitable version of the RSI as a sort of 'stabilizing influence' in this period. De Felice has argued that the RSI was necessary and that the men and women who supported it did so out of a desire to protect Italians from the staggering brutality that the Germans had employed in Poland, for example.<sup>2</sup> However, this thesis has presented a very different picture. De Felice has also maintained that within the RSI there was a sharp divide between 'extremists' and 'moderates',<sup>3</sup> but as Chapter Six has shown, in the case of Udine, the demarcation lines were not as clear as he had claimed. Although the violence was often perpetrated by paramilitary thugs, many RSI officials were involved in the organisation of the *rastrellamenti*. In De Felice's view, the atrocities can be blamed on a 'climate of civil war' created by partisans and Republicans alike.<sup>4</sup> However, the evidence that I have presented demonstrates that Republicans did perpetrate violence against innocent civilians that was quite clearly designed to terrorize rural communities as part of the coercion and repression intrinsic to German occupation. Thus, the idea that the *Repubblica sociale italiana* somehow shielded Italians from the worst excesses of German occupation is misplaced or even some kind of special pleading.

As Klinkhammer has shown, much of the violence in this period was organised by German soldiers, in particular the SS divisions, especially in the border provinces. Without denying that the German armed forces organised and led the vast majority of attacks against rural communities, this thesis has discussed trial evidence that suggests Italians themselves were responsible for much of the violence, and that their extraordinary brutality was a vital component of the terror unleashed by German occupation. My research does support Klinkhammer's conclusion that the Nazis ruthlessly exploited the Italian people for labour as part of the German war effort. However, it also demonstrates that Italians had a much greater role in the violence and exploitation than his account of German occupation suggests.

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<sup>2</sup> De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*. 2. *La guerra civile*, 64-66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

It is worthwhile noting that Klinkhammer's study of the German occupation of Italy deliberately avoids dealing with the province of Udine because it was under direct German rule, with its own Gauleiter, Friedrich Rainer, and, in Klinkhammer's view, therefore represents a very different case.<sup>5</sup> My case study of Udine fills this gap. More to the point, my thesis shows that, even in a directly-ruled border province like this, Republicans had a particularly important role in the German occupation. In Udine things were no different from the rest of occupied Italy in terms of RSI's involvement in war atrocities.

Instead of confirming existing stereotypes of Italy's war, this thesis has demonstrated that officials and functionaries at local level either did not fully comprehend or were not fully committed to national policies. This meant that there were limits to how useful local PNF leaders and other authorities could be in the war effort at provincial level. This case study suggests that Fascism decided to work with, rather than try to override, these local attitudes, but the result was that the state was denied any effective control over the home front.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>5</sup> Lutz Klinkhammer, *L'Occupazione tedesca in Italia 1943-1945* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993), 22.



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### ABBREVIATIONS

- b. – busta (folder)
- f. – fascicolo (file)
- sf. – sottofascicolo (sub-file)

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